MERCILESS
PARK AVENUE KINGS
USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHORS
ELLA FRANK
AND
BROOKE BLAINE

MERCILESS

PARK AVENUE KINGS

BOOK FOUR

ELLA FRANK

BROOKE BLAINE

OCEANOFPDF.COM

Copyright © 2025 by Ella Frank & Brooke Blaine

www.ellafrank.com

www.BrookeBlaine.com

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover Design: Hang Le
Cover Photo: Ren Saliba
Edited by Arran McNicol

OceanofPDF.com

CONTENTS

Synopsis

1. Shep
2. Theo
3. Shep
4. Theo
5. Shep
6. Theo
7. Shep
8. Theo
9. Shep
10. Theo
11. Shep
12. Theo
13. Shep
14. Theo
15. Shep
16. Shep
17. Theo
18. Shep
19. Theo
20. Shep
21. Theo
22. Shep
23. Theo
24. Theo
25. Theo
26. Shep
27. Theo
28. Shep
29. Theo
30. Shep

31. Theo
32. Shep
33. Theo
34. Shep
35. Shep
36. Theo
37. Shep
38. Theo
39. Shep

Thank You
Special Thanks
Also by Ella Frank
Also by Brooke Blaine
About Ella Frank
About Brooke Blaine

OceanofPDF.com

SYNOPSIS

He was sent to watch me. Now he can't look away.

They sent the president's son to babysit me.
How precious.

Shepherd "Shep" Winchester III thinks he's here to keep me in line—keep me quiet, keep me still, keep me safe.
Good luck with that.

I'm Theodore "Theo" Rinaldi, the youngest Prince of Monaco, and the most merciless of the Park Avenue Kings. And I don't *do* obedient. Not for my royal family. Not for the crown. And definitely not for the suit King sent to shadow me.

Shep is all discipline and duty.
I'm chaos in a custom suit.
We clash. We combust.
And then we cross a line we can't uncross.

Now there's a blackmailer on our trail, a target on my back, and the Kings think I'm the traitor. But if they want to come for me, they'll have to get through him.

Because the soldier with the perfect posture and the unreadable eyes?
He's not just protecting me anymore.

He’s falling for me.
And I’m going to ruin him for it.

Merciless (Park Avenue Kings #4) *is the first book in a duet within the Park Avenue Kings series.* ***Ruthless (Park Avenue Kings #5)*** *will be the continuation.*

OceanofPDF.com

1

SHEP

I HAD A bad feeling about this.

It wasn't just the fact that the streets of Monaco were overflowing with a cheering crowd waiting for a glimpse of their prince and his bride-to-be that had me on edge, but it sure as hell didn't help.

"This is an even bigger crowd than the last time we were here," Kai said, scooting forward in his seat, those innocent eyes wide and excited. He hit the button to lower the window, and while my first instinct was to shove him back from inviting onlookers into the privacy of our limo, I instead cut my eyes at Lucien.

I didn't have to say a word as my longtime friend—brother at this point, really—smirked at the irritation I knew was written all over my face.

"Relax, Shep," he said, stretching his long legs out like he didn't have a care in the world. His hand rested on Kai's lower back, always touching, always connected, even as his younger boyfriend smiled and waved at everyone we passed.

"Easy for you to say," I muttered as I continually scanned the crowd, my body hyper alert, as always. Living in the public eye my whole life meant never letting your guard down, but it was more than that today. We had a wild card on our hands, and there was no telling how the day would unfold.

"Here. Take the edge off." Lucien leaned forward and held his freshly topped glass of champagne out to me.

When I shook my head, he shrugged, his gaze drifting back to Kai.

“Theo’s not going to do anything stupid.”

“If that was a guarantee, I wouldn’t be here.”

“Sure you would.” He shot me a wink. “Someone from American political royalty has to make an appearance. And no offense to your father, but you’re much easier on the eyes.”

The car began to slow behind the procession of vehicles heading toward the Cathedral of Our Lady Immaculate, and as we idled there waiting our turn, someone in the crowd caught sight of me and began to shout.

“Shepard! Look, it’s Shepard Winchester—”

Fuck.

It didn’t take more than a few seconds before others caught on to who was inside, and as more of the crowd began shouting my name, I didn’t have any other choice but to give them a charming smile and wave.

Kai looked back at me, a sheepish look on his face, and as the car began to move again, he rolled the window back up.

“Sorry, I wasn’t thinking—”

“It’s fine,” I said. It wasn’t, but the last thing I wanted was to rain on his parade. He’d been good for Lucien, and his excitement over coming back to Monaco and being here for the royal wedding *was* a little infectious.

Even if love was the last thing I was in the mood to celebrate.

That was a whole other issue, though, and one I’d happily left back in New York City. At least here I only had Lucien and Kai to contend with. Whereas back in the city it seemed everywhere I looked, one of my brothers was leaving the single life behind.

It wasn’t that I begrudged them a happily-ever-after, but did it have to happen when mine had up and vanished right before my very eyes?

“Shep?”

“Sorry, what?” I shook myself out of that depressing headspace and turned to see Lucien looking at me expectantly.

“They’re waiting for you.”

Shit. I hadn’t even noticed the door being pulled open. So much for paying attention.

Jesus, get your head in the game, asshole.

I brushed a hand down my suit jacket and gave myself a final once-over, then stepped out of the car. The second I emerged, recognition dawned, and the crowd surrounding the front entrance of the church let out a joyous

cheer like I was about to give some sort of performance—and in a way, I was.

I plastered on my most charming smile, and as I waved to the masses, every single hour of publicity training I'd been through in my younger years resurfaced. That was what happened when your father campaigned for years on end and then became the president of the United States. You learned how to smile when you were miserable. Wave when you wanted to flip off a camera. Be cordial even when someone was a total asshole.

I was the epitome of polite social grace in public. An expert at pleasing the press. I'd had to be. And as I waved at the cameras snapping photos and zooming in, all I could think was: *Get me out of here.*

"Shepard! Over here, Shepard!"

"Looking gorgeous as always, Shep!"

"Shepard, are you here with anyone?"

And that was my cue to leave.

I made my way up the stairs—solo—as Lucien and Kai exited the car, and when I stepped inside the enormous church doors, I finally let out the breath I'd been holding.

It wasn't that I hadn't expected the press to recognize me—my face was one of the most famous in the world—but for the first time in years I wasn't sure I could mask the emotions roiling under the surface.

I was off my game, had been for a while now, and when you were hiding secrets as deep and volatile as I was, that was dangerous. Emotions made you vulnerable, and the last thing I needed was someone catching me unawares on camera.

King would just love that.

But fuck him.

"Wow," Kai said, beaming as Lucien pulled him in tight to his side. "I thought the outside of the church was beautiful, but this is *breathtaking*."

He stared up the long aisle that was awash in white flowers, silk ribbons, and lace, where people sat in pews dressed to the nines. The sun shone through the stained-glass windows and dappled the guests in sunlight, and while I'd been in churches and castles much bigger than this one, he wasn't wrong. There was something ethereal about the sight.

"Mr. Winchester?" An usher stopped by the three of us, and I gave a clipped nod. "If you'll follow me, I'll take you to your seats."

“Just a moment, please,” came a soft female voice from behind me, and I turned to see Princess Jacqueline, the mother of the groom, looking at me with eyes laced with worry.

Shit. That wasn’t a good sign.

She forced a smile at the usher and took my arm, casually walking us away for privacy. “You haven’t seen Theo, have you?”

And there it was. I was going to kill him.

I took a slow, measured breath. “Where is he supposed to be?”

“With the other groomsmen, but no one’s seen him all morning, and I—”

I put my hand over hers. “I’ll take care of it.”

Relief filled her face and she nodded. “Thank you. I knew if anyone could, it would be you. You’re such a good friend to Theo.”

She might not think that after I murder him.

After passing her off to Lucien, who waited nearby with a look that told me he’d been wrong about hoping our resident troublemaker would behave today of all days, I slipped through a side door and let instinct guide me.

I should’ve gotten here sooner. Hell, I should’ve watched Theo’s every waking minute leading up to today knowing how unnerved he got around his family—particularly his brother. Today being his brother’s big day was a recipe for disaster. But meetings and prior engagements had prevented me from arriving earlier, which meant “babysitter” really should’ve been a job King gave to someone else.

Because now we had an MIA Theo, but I’d be damned if there was anything in life I failed at—finding that pain in my ass included.

OceanofPDF.com

2

THEO

"WOULD YOU PLEASE put that out and fix your tie? Or are you trying to make me late for my own wedding?"

I took a deep drag of my kretek and held it in, in an effort not to say something I'd regret.

But where was the fun in that?

I stalked toward where my brother stood in front of a full-length mirror admiring the fit of his military uniform and blew the smoke in his direction. "What are you so worried about? It's not like they can start without you."

His eyes met mine in the mirror, and his scowl was just the reaction I'd been trying to provoke. "For fuck's sake, Theo, this has all been planned down to the minute, you know that."

"You're the boss. You can be fashionably late."

"I don't *want* to be late," he said, whirling around to face me. "I want to get this day started so I can relax on a yacht in the Seychelles for a few weeks. Maybe you don't get that, since you can party it up any day of the week, but some of us have responsibilities."

"Ah, yes, because apparently I have none of those. Dick." Taking another drag of my clove cigarette, I moved in front of the mirror and inspected the navy suit I'd been instructed to wear. "What's wrong with my tie?"

"It's not choking you, for one," Jean grumbled before looking at the clock and sighing. He turned me to face him and unknotted the tie—which, for the record, looked perfectly fine. As he began to retie it to his ridiculous

liking, I couldn't help but feel the minuscule five-year age difference between us like a gulf. Hell, I was thirty-seven now, not some kid who needed his big brother to help him get ready for a royal event. But Jean had always been the one prepping for his role as the future head of Monaco once our father stepped down, and I was merely the backup.

"I can fucking do it," I said, shoving him away and lifting the kretek to rest between my lips so I could use both hands to fix the mess he'd made. Being the spare, I didn't have to be so goddamn perfect, and I didn't need this tie strangling me for the next twelve hours.

"That's not tight enough—"

"Take it or leave it, Jean."

His jaw tensed and he closed his eyes like he was struggling not to fight back, but that was what we did best, right? So it wasn't a surprise when he couldn't resist saying, "You're such an asshole, you know that?"

I smirked at myself in the mirror and tugged the sleeves of my jacket down. "Sure do."

"Do you think you can manage reining that in for a few hours? For Katerina's sake, not mine. God knows I wouldn't want you to behave on *my* account."

Behave? Like I was some out-of-control delinquent hellbent on making his wedding day a disaster? My blood practically boiled under the surface. He was lucky I was here. It wasn't a secret to anyone that we didn't get along, hadn't for years, but I was doing my part and being a good royal. I was here. Asking for any more than that was bullshit.

"Hello? Did you hear me?" Jean began to pace the room, and seeing him riled up brought a tiny bit of satisfaction to the shit morning so far.

"Yes, instead of *being* an asshole," I said, tapping the kretek's ashes into the remains of his champagne glass on the table. "You want me to take a pole and shove it *up* my asshole."

Jean was across the room before I could blink, reaching for the lapels of my jacket, paying no mind to his speech on looking royally perfect for his wedding.

Seemed I'd really pissed him off.

Good.

A rapid knock on the door had us glancing in that direction, and before Jean could loosen his grip, it swung open to reveal the *other* reason for my stellar mood today—Shepard fucking Winchester the third.

I wasn’t stupid. I’d known his family would be invited—of course they would be. They were American royalty, after all, so Shep was always going to be on the list. But that wasn’t the only reason he was here, and that was what chafed.

He’d been sent by King.

Even if I hadn’t heard the words myself, the calculating way Shep’s eyes shifted between me and my brother and the way his lips twisted into a disappointed scowl told me everything I needed to know.

Bossman had sent his little lapdog to keep an eye on me, and fuck if that didn’t grate on my last nerve.

“You need something?” I said like my brother wasn’t about to decorate my face with his fist. “If not, we’re in the middle of some royal business. *Casse-toi.*”

Shep’s eyes narrowed a fraction as Jean cursed and shoved me away.

“I came to check up on you,” Shep said all matter-of-fact. And if I didn’t know better, I’d think that pole Jean was so intent on using on me was shoved right up *his* ass.

“Well,” I said, holding my arms out to the side, “here I am.”

“Jesus,” Jean muttered, and then added, “*Putain mais tu la fermes jamais?”*

“Hmm, not sure you want the answer to that right now. It might offend your sensibilities.” I reached for my kretek. “Or make you jealous as you’re about to go on your honeymoon.”

“Theo,” Shep said in a warning tone as Jean shook his head and marched toward the door.

“Can you deal with him?” he said to Shep as though I was a problem he was over.

Shep’s eyes cut back to mine, and he gave a curt nod. Jean brushed by him, slamming the door in his wake, and as the echo of it thundered off the wall, I grimaced.

“I’m not sure, but I think I pissed him off.”

“Seems to be a habit of yours.” Shep slipped his hands into the pockets of his tailored pants, and my eyes shifted to the perfect fit of them across his trim hips.

I took a drag of the cigarette, and the crackle of it popped in the room. “And what would you know about my habits?”

“That you have too many bad ones,” he said as he walked into the small room. “This included.” Shep reached for the cigarette and stubbed it out in the glass before arching his brow. “Want to tell me what that was about?”

Shep was, in a way, second-in-command of the Libertines—my boss, you could say. Not that the seven of us played by many rules, but someone had to keep our group of billionaire visionaries in line. After all, using our deep global connections to wield our influence and power wasn’t an easy, or safe, task. Probably why I had been drawn to King’s proposal to join him in the first place all those years ago. Royal duties were one thing—an incredibly boring, but well-connected thing—but playing masked vigilante in the shadows was far more entertaining.

Even if it was with Shep, who was wound tighter than a drum with that steely exterior that made me want to poke at him.

“I didn’t sleep with the bride, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“Would you be fucking serious for once in your life?”

“Why? You’re busy being serious enough for the both of us. Lighten up,” I said with false joviality. “We’re at a wedding. This is meant to be a joyous occasion.”

“One that’s going to be broadcast globally. You need to pull yourself together.”

I gritted my teeth and turned toward the window in an effort to curb my tongue, but why should I? Everyone seemed to think it was okay to tell me what to wear, how to act, and what to feel today. “Is that an order from you or the illustrious King?”

“I didn’t think you had a king in Monaco.”

I glanced over my shoulder at the all-too-serious expression on Shep’s handsome face. No wonder everyone wanted a fucking photo of it. Even scowling he looked like a model with that sculpted jaw and full lips.

“Not the *king* I was referring to.” Shep’s shoulders stiffened slightly, and I scoffed, “Ah, I see. This is about *your* King.”

Irritation rolled off Shep as he angled his chin up an inch, then did his best to look down his perfect nose at me. “I don’t have a king either.”

“Uh huh.” I chuckled. Seemed I was two for two in pissing people off today. “You keep telling yourself that. Maybe one day you’ll believe it.”

I went to turn back to the window, but Shep grabbed hold of my arm and spun me back to face him.

“Listen, I don’t know what is going on with you right now, but you need to get your head in the game. Your brother is about to get married. That might not mean a lot to you, but it sure as shit means a lot to the rest of the world.”

“And King,” I added, just to get under his skin.

“What?”

“It also means a lot to King. Not the marriage part, but the part where I behave myself. That’s why he sent you, right?”

“I was invited.”

“An invitation you would’ve declined if *King* hadn’t asked you to come and watch me.”

I was right, and we both knew it. This wedding was a world-class affair. There were heads of state, prime ministers, presidents, and other royals, and King would expect me to put my best foot forward and mingle with the higher-ups. So would my parents, but they were used to my disappointing them.

King, on the other hand, was used to my reluctant obedience.

Shep’s jaw began to twitch as he glared down at me, the fingers on my arm tightening as he yanked me in a little closer.

“He didn’t ask me to watch you.”

I knew I should shut my mouth, hold back the caustic remarks I wanted to spit out. But my rage and frustration had been building all week, and this was just the icing on the damn cake.

“Oh, okay, so he *ordered* you to. Got it,” I said, then shook my head. “You know, I’ve always been curious about how that works now that you two are…well, not fucking anymore.”

Those fingers on my arm dug in so hard that I knew they’d leave a bruise. But I was in it now, my mouth writing checks I knew I couldn’t cash, and since my brother wasn’t here for me to lash out at, Shep would have to do.

“He tossed you aside, hooked up with two younger guys, and yet here you are still doing his bidding. How’s that feel?”

Shep yanked me in so hard and fast that I had to put a hand up not to stumble, and when it landed on his hard chest, I could feel the rapid beat of his heart.

“Say that again,” he dared me in a voice so fucking cold it sent a shiver up my spine.

But if he thought that was going to stop me, he was dead wrong.

OceanofPDF.com

3

SHEP

MY TONE SHOULD'VE had Theo thinking twice about his next words. He knew better than to push me too far, and yet he lifted his chin in defiance anyway.

"I *said*"—he pushed me back—"how's it feel to be tossed aside for two younger guys?"

I'd heard him the first time, but now I saw red.

"Motherfucking piece of shit…" I shoved him against the wall so hard it knocked the breath out of him, but it only made him smile.

"Do it. Hit me. I dare you."

I wanted to. With the haze of rage clouding my vision it would be easy to demolish that smug, attractive face. But then I'd be sending him out into the world unrecognizable, and that would invite too many questions.

Theo ducked out of my grasp, and then his shoulder nailed my stomach as he drove me back like a linebacker.

Jesus, I always forgot how strong and quick the bastard was. Though he'd never full-on attacked me or any of our brothers before, I'd seen him in action plenty of times, and I wasn't about to let him get the upper hand. Once Theo knocked someone to the ground, it was game over for his opponent.

Before my back hit the wall, I wrestled myself out of his grip and shoved him off me.

"Dammit, Theo, this is not the time—"

He lunged for me again, his hard body colliding with mine. We barely missed ramming into the mirror, knocking into the edge of the couch instead, but all it did was slide the furniture back a few feet.

Jesus, he was fucking *insane*. But that was the problem with Theo. He didn't think before he reacted, just lashed out, and while I was usually the levelheaded one, he had pushed me too far.

I grabbed hold of his lapels and lurched to my feet, muscling him back with all the fury racing through me. When his back hit the wall, I kept coming until my leg was between his and my weight was holding him in place, knowing if I gave an inch he'd take full advantage.

"Calm the fuck down," I ordered him.

But it was too late. Theo's switch had been flicked, and his eyes glittered with deranged excitement. I could feel his heart thudding against my hand as I pinned him to the wall, and when he lunged at me, I grabbed hold of his jaw.

Fucker had always gotten off on a good fight, but when he turned his head and bit down into the flesh between my thumb and index finger, I cursed and ripped my hand away, hauling him off the wall and spinning him to face the brick.

"You fucking animal," I growled, my breath heaving as I crowded into the unruly man under me.

Theo planted his hands on the wall and shoved back into me, his ass grazing over the zipper of my pants, and it wasn't until that exact moment I realized…I was hard.

And so did he.

A dark chuckle rumbled out of Theo as he repeated the move, taunting me with malicious delight, and I reached for his shoulder and shoved him so his cheek was flat against the brick.

I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to remember why I was there: to find Theo and deliver him to the altar for his brother's wedding. Not to—

"I fuck like an animal too."

My cock punched against the confines of my pants, the savage promise teasing my aching dick in a way I didn't know was possible.

"You're thinking about it."

"Shut the fuck up," I snapped, because I *was* thinking about it. Now it was *all* I could think about as I stared at the back of his dark hair, the broad

outline of his shoulders in that suit, and the way he was spreading his legs a little wider for me.

It would be so easy to unzip and slide—

"How long's it been, Shep?" Theo rubbed back on me, and all the annoyance and fury that had been radiating through me morphed into pure frustration. "Weeks? Months? *Years?*" When I didn't respond, he let out a mocking whistle. "Wow, King really did a number on you, didn't he? While he went off and found two—"

With a growl, I muscled him against the wall even harder, cutting him off, but all that did was remind my aching cock of the truth of his words. It *had* been too long, though I wasn't giving anyone the satisfaction of thinking my abstinence was because of King. *Or* the two brats he'd taken into his bed.

Theo reached back for my hand and brought it around to stroke his covered cock, and the second I felt the way it pulsated beneath my grasp, so hard he had to be close to bursting out of his dress pants, I knew I was fucked.

Or, rather, he was, because I wasn't leaving this room now without the sweet release his ass promised.

I shoved his hand away, but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of being in control. He'd started this shit, and now he was going to have to deal with *my* terms.

I unbuttoned his pants and shoved them down past his ass before unzipping my own. The rush of emotions flowing through me overrode any rational thought, but I was past the point of caring now. My mouth watered at the two plump ass cheeks pushing back against my dick, begging for me to get between them.

"Stop thinking," Theo said, "and fuck me. Or would you rather I ask King—"

I didn't let him get out the rest before I spread his cheeks apart, lined my cock up against his hot hole, and shoved inside him.

That shut him up. He was too busy gasping for breath at my intrusion to hound me anymore, and I was too lost in how his ass choked my cock to care.

Cursing, I forced myself to move past how good he felt, because now wasn't the time to linger. He was just a body to use and punish, and he'd asked for every bit of this.

Too bad he was such an instigator that my being balls deep inside him—without lube—didn't keep his mouth shut for long.

"Come on, Shep," he said on a ragged breath. "Fuck me like you mean it. Or don't you wanna teach me a lesson?"

Keeping a bruising grip on his hip, I reached up with my other hand to pin him by the back of the neck against the wall. An impish smile curled his mouth, but he no longer had the ability to talk, to move, to do anything other than take what I gave him.

"I don't remember asking for your assistance," I said by his ear. "So how about you do us *both* a favor and shut your fucking mouth?"

I pulled my hips back a fraction and, before Theo could even try to respond, rammed home. A loud curse splintered the air as I tunneled back inside him with no thought other than how damn good he felt surrounding my dick.

Goddamn it. Of all the things I should be doing to him right now, fucking his brains out wasn't on the list. But as his body swallowed mine, and the ball-tingling pleasure of being lost in a tight, hot hole flooded my system, I couldn't bring myself to stop…or care.

Responsibilities be damned. It was too late now. I'd crossed a line, one I knew was going to be difficult to come back from. It wasn't just that he was a fellow King. He was also the most unhinged. The most unpredictable.

If I was going to break the rules, why couldn't it have been with someone less volatile?

But as I shoved forward again and bottomed out, I gnashed my teeth together at the toe-curling pleasure. Then I reached around him and took hold of his cock.

"Fuck yes," he muttered, and pushed through my fist. "Give me something to fuck."

"I told you to shut up," I muttered, slicking his pre-cum up his length. But of course he didn't listen.

"If that's what you wanted, then your dick is in the wrong place."

My balls tightened at the idea of stuffing it between his shit-talking lips. How satisfying it would be to choke him for real with my cock. But since this was never going to happen again, I had to be satisfied with destroying his ass.

Giving his length several punishing pulls, I railed at him—*in* him—like I never had before. His goading invitation was all I needed to take this

moment we never should've been taking.

But hell if I was about to stop now.

The scent of sex was heady as it swirled in the room, and when Theo reached down and covered my hand where I was milking him, I leaned forward and said by his ear, "I can fuck like an animal too."

OceanofPDF.com

4

THEO

I’D ALWAYS HAD my suspicions about Shep. Anyone wound that tight was bound to explode at some point, which had made me curious what that meant for his sex life. Was he a dom who needed to exert control over his partners? Did he prefer letting someone else take charge for once? He was too damn attractive *not* to have a rotating list of men eager to get between the sheets with him, but the way he was railing me with abandon told me it’d been way too long since he’d taken his frustrations out on a willing body.

That would’ve been a damn shame—if it wasn’t my ass he was pounding into.

Fuck yes, I needed this, the rough way he slid his fist up and down my dick, how he wasn’t giving me an inch of breathing room with my face pushed up against the wall, the raw burn from his shoving inside me with furious exasperation. I’d be feeling Shep all day, and that was exactly the distraction I needed from the royal circus.

Bracing myself against the wall, I smirked at his words, because he wasn’t lying: Shep really *did* fuck like an animal.

“Damn, Shep. I didn’t know you had it in you.”

“Fuck you.”

“Mmm, yeah, you are. Fucking me real good—”

Before I could say any more, he thrust inside me, hitting my prostate with such force that he knocked the breath out of me. He held me there,

pinned to the wall, rocking against my P-spot as his fingers circled the head of my dick and squeezed.

Holy shit. The feeling was so intense I almost blacked out, and then his savage chuckle echoed in my ear.

“Too much for the prince? Want me to be more polite?”

I managed to suck in some air as the edges of my vision came back. “Hell no. Do it again.”

If he really wanted to torture me, he would do the exact opposite of what I asked, but thank fuck neither of us were thinking clearly right now, because he nailed that spot again and I couldn’t help my string of curses.

I should probably be more mindful of where we were—a church.

And who might be listening—the big guy *or* family members.

Both would be equally offended by my litany of curse words. But Shep? Well, turned out he fucked like a god.

I squeezed my eyes shut, and when his fist tightened around me and he tunneled inside again, I lost what little hold I had left on my control.

I shoved back on the thick cock penetrating me, as Shep pressed his lips against my neck to muffle his shout. It seemed he’d reached his limit too, and when the hot rush of his cum exploded and filled my ass, any remaining restraint vanished.

My dick jerked in Shep’s strong hand, and as he milked me dry, every single reason this was a bad idea came flooding back into my sex-addled brain.

We worked together.

He was the most uptight asshole I knew.

He was one of the most famous people in the world.

And—this was probably the most important reason, the one likely to get me killed—he was my boss’s ex.

Shepard Winchester the third was the last man on the planet I should’ve let fuck me.

But man had he fucked me good.

“Get dressed.”

Jesus. The uptight ass couldn’t even enjoy an orgasm without all his responsibilities reminding him that hot sex in a church alcove hadn’t been on his schedule today.

“I will, when I’m able to move again. In case you missed it, you just tried to split me in half.”

“Clearly I didn’t succeed, since you’re still able to talk.”

I reached for my pants, and as I pulled them up, I glanced over my shoulder to see Shep running a hand through his hair.

How he could go from total turbulence to complete calm in a matter of seconds had always been a mystery to me. But with the residual ache radiating through me, I knew I hadn’t imagined what just happened.

Shep *was* a fucking animal—when let off his leash.

The question was, who controlled that leash? Shep or King?

“What is your problem?” I said as I shoved the tails of my shirt into my pants and zipped up. “I’m the one who has to go and stand in front of a priest with your cum—”

“Don’t you dare say—”

“—dripping out of me.”

Shep glared at me so hard I thought his eyeballs might roll out of their sockets.

“What, does that offend your sensibilities?”

“*You* are offending my sensibilities. This was—”

“Hot as hell?”

Shep spun away from me, shaking his head. “A fucking mistake.”

“You can’t even enjoy a hot fuck for a minute before regret sets in? Jesus, Shep, no wonder you don’t get repeats.”

He didn’t respond to that, his eyes narrowing as they ran down over me. Where most would be admiring in their perusal, because I wasn’t anything to sneeze at, Shep’s critical gaze stopped at my neck. “Your tie’s crooked.”

“I don’t give a shit.”

“You should. You’re late.”

“I’ll apologize when I get there. Tell them all I had Shepard Winchester’s big dick in my ass—”

Shep whirled on me so fast our chests bumped and I had to lift my chin to meet his eyes. There were daggers shooting out of those ice-blue depths, but I smiled.

“Don’t even think about it,” he growled. “I mean it, Theo. This stays here.”

“Why? You’d get a lot more interest if people knew. ‘Sure, he’s a tight-ass, but have you seen the size of his cock?’”

“I don’t need interest. I need you to fix your goddamn tie and get out there.”

That bark of his was sharp, but how had I never noticed it had nothing on the sharp cut of his jaw? Everyone in the world knew how hot Shep was, and I wasn't oblivious either, but now I couldn't help but look at him through a different lens than before.

All that scowling really did make him a seriously sexy fucker.

Or maybe that was just the lingering sting from his massive cock talking.

I reached into the box of hand-rolled kreteks, pulled one out, and brought it to my lips. But before I could light it, Shep yanked it out of my mouth and tossed it aside.

"You need to go," he said.

"And you obviously need the tables flipped next time."

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me. Clearly an orgasm didn't do it, but maybe you need the serious fucked out of *you* next time."

He stared at me long and hard before turning toward the mirror to adjust his suit. "There won't be a next time."

"Hey, you're the one who opened the door. Too late to lock it now."

"More like padlock and fucking bolt it," Shep muttered.

"What was that?"

He let out a long-suffering sigh. "Just regretting my life choices right now." He walked over to the door, pulled it open, and waited for me, tapping his foot—yes, tapping his fucking foot.

It took everything I had not to walk over and stomp on it.

"You know what I think your real problem is?" I said as I studied him.

"I'm sure I don't give a shit."

I strolled over to him. "It's that you don't regret it at all. In fact"—I pulled the folded handkerchief from my pocket and held it out to him —"you're just worried people will know what you were in here doing."

Shep stared at the white square with a questioning brow, and I gestured to his hand.

"You're not the only one who left a mark."

Shep glanced down to see some blood and teeth marks marring his skin. He snatched the handkerchief from my fingers, and as I strolled past him, the last thing I heard was, "Fucking animal."

OceanofPDF.com

5

SHEP

I WASN'T A man who made decisions lightly. Doing so led to mistakes, which led to regret, and I wasn't a fan of either.

It was why I was so good at being the powerbroker for the Kings, why I was made for being in the public eye in the first place. Cool, calm, and collected. That was me. Always had been.

So where in God's name had my brain gone in the last twenty minutes for me to make such a catastrophic mistake?

I didn't have time to think about that while I was hauling ass back to the sanctuary, where members of the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic had already begun to play. Theo better have gotten *his* ass where he needed to be, or all hell was going to break loose. I couldn't say whether it would be his brother or me who got to him first if he fucked around, but as I entered the vestibule, I caught his mother's eye from across the room, and she acknowledged me with a smile and a nod.

Thank fuck. Theo had made it, and now everything would go off without a hitch.

Hopefully.

I blew out a heavy breath, adrenaline still pumping through my veins as I made my way down the aisle to where Lucien and Kai sat in the fifth row.

Lucien arched a brow as I slid in beside him. "You good?"

"Fine. Why?"

He glanced down at the blood-flecked handkerchief I still held, and I cursed under my breath and shoved my hand in my pocket.

“He’ll be here. That’s what matters,” I said.

“But he drew blood first?” When I didn’t respond, Lucien let out a low chuckle and shook his head. “He’s a wild one. Glad you sorted him out.”

Shit, I had never been more thankful for my poker face than I was right then. *Sorted him out.* More like fucked his brains out and sent him on his way, which just so happened to be front and center in a church with the ceremony being broadcast around the world.

No big deal.

The music changed then, and soon after came the priest who’d be officiating, followed by Prince Jean…and Theo. *Prince* Theo.

I swallowed back my mortified groan as I stared at the perfect fit of Theo’s tailored suit and remembered the exact way those pants had looked pulled down under that tight ass of his—

Fuck.

“Uh, you okay over there?” Lucien frowned at me. “You sound like you’re choking.”

I cleared my throat and shook my head. “It’s a little warm in here, don’t you think?”

“No. You sure you’re feeling all right?”

I cracked my neck from side to side and turned back to face the front, where the two royal brothers now stood, and felt my breath catch.

God, I felt like I was going to hyperventilate.

“Seriously, man—”

“Leave it alone, Lucien,” I snapped, and immediately regretted it. But the more he talked, the worse I felt, and the last thing I needed was to pass out at the royal wedding.

Luckily for me, that was when the music started up, and as everyone turned to look for Katerina—the bride—I found myself locking my eyes on Theo.

Somewhere between our *interlude* and this moment, he’d brushed his hair back from his face, and as his eyes scanned the pews and found me, they glittered with teasing delight. I knew I should turn away, focus on the beautiful bride walking up the aisle, but, not daring to relinquish my stare on the troublemaker standing at the altar, I kept my focus centered.

At least, that was what I told myself.

It had nothing to do with the fact that Theo’s cheeks were deliciously flushed, his suit lapels were ever so slightly creased, and those taunting lips

curved into a smirk, reminding me what a royal pain in my ass he was.

Great, now I was busy remembering his suggestion.

"…maybe you need the serious fucked out of you *next time."*

"Maybe something is going around?" Lucien said, and I finally tore my eyes away from the altar and focused on the bride.

"What's that?"

"You're not feeling well. Theo looks a little flushed too."

I spun to face Lucien, whose eyes were twinkling.

"You think he's coming down with something? Did he say anything when you found him?"

Other than begging me to fuck him? "No. I'm sure he's fine. I told you, it's warm in here."

"Hmm." Lucien nodded as we all faced forward and Katerina finally reached her groom. "Maybe. If not, I'm sure you'll take care of him."

And that was the problem. I'd been sent to take care of Theo and had just plain *taken* him instead. So much for being the good soldier King expected me to be.

The priest moved to stand in front of the couple, and as the music faded out and everyone finally took their seats, the ceremony began.

"THAT WAS THE best wedding I've ever been to," Kai said as we all filed into Villa Monaco later that night. The mansion sat on a cliff overlooking the crystal-blue Mediterranean below and was owned by all of the Libertine Kings for our many trips to the South of France—and for Theo to escape to when palace life got to be a little too much.

But he wasn't here tonight, thank fuck. It'd been all I could do to avoid him during the hours-long reception, though given our titles, we were obligated to take photos for the press. The fact that he'd restrained himself from doing something stupid like grabbing my ass was shocking, but I didn't linger in his presence for long. No need to tempt the beast.

"The best, huh?" I said to Kai. "I thought you said it was your first."

"First *and* best. What's gonna beat a royal wedding?"

Lucien smirked at me over Kai's head, and he didn't have to say what he was thinking. That look said he'd be taking that comment as a challenge for whenever he decided to pop the question. Something I had a feeling was coming sooner than later, but my lips were sealed.

Lucien strolled past me and winked as he followed after Kai. “Did you choose a room for us yet?”

Kai whirled around, excitement sparking in his eyes. “Actually, I thought we could call dibs on the outdoor bed. You know…like last time.”

God, I didn’t want to know what happened out there last time, or any time. If that was where the lovers would be tonight, I’d find a room on the opposite end of the house.

“No complaints from me,” I said. “You two have fun.”

Kai let out a whoop and grabbed Lucien’s hands, tugging him toward the back door. As they disappeared outside, I headed upstairs.

It’d been a long fucking day, and I was grateful the rest of the house was empty, so my time socializing was over. I could put on the Mr. Charming front when I needed to, but damn if it hadn’t drained my battery by the time I hit the bed.

My bags were already in my usual room, but since that had a view of the backyard—and now the lovebirds—I wheeled them down the hall toward a room that faced the front.

I flipped on the light and walked over to the open window where the view of Monaco sparkled in the night. It was beautiful here, I couldn’t deny that, and while it was usually a quiet place to visit, people were still out in the streets toasting the big day. The last time they’d had a royal wedding was forty years ago, so this was a special time for everyone here, with even more celebrations taking place over the next few days.

As I scanned the horizon, my eyes caught on the palace, instantly sending my thoughts somewhere they shouldn’t be.

Fucking Theo. I still couldn’t believe he’d provoked me into—

No. I wasn’t going there. It was bad enough that it had happened, and the last thing I needed to do was revisit it when I was about to get into bed.

Best to put it behind me. Far, *far* behind me. But that was easier said than done when I was in a city that had reminders of him and his family all over it.

Turning away from the window, I grabbed my laptop bag and moved to the recliner in the corner. Kicking out of my shoes, I sat down and powered up my computer. I’d do a quick check-in, make sure there wasn’t anything important waiting for me, then hit the sack.

I punched in my password to open my secure email and, as I waited for it to load, looked down at the teeth marks on my hand. I still couldn’t

believe Theo had bitten me.

Hell, what was I thinking? Of course he'd bitten me—the guy was crazy; we all knew that. Ready to fly off the handle at any opportunity, and apparently mid-fuck also.

Christ. Stop. Thinking. About. Him.

I shifted my attention back to the screen, and scanned my emails. Nothing of immediate importance jumped out at me until a message addressed to all my brothers appeared.

Subject line: YOUR PRINCE HAS A SECRET…

I frowned and clicked on the message, knowing it was safe from viruses if it had already been filtered through Alessio's firewalls. But I was unfamiliar with the sender, which had me a little on edge.

The message opened to show a video attachment titled *BOOM*, and as I clicked it open, my phone started to vibrate in my pocket.

With my eyes locked on the screen, I fished out my phone. The video was clear but shaky, the camera positioned to face a nondescript building several stories high. There were no signs, no hint of where the building was or what it was, and the only sound was distant traffic as the camera zoomed in on the doors across the street.

I flipped my phone over to see King's name flashing across the screen. As I answered the call and brought it to my ear, movement on the computer caught my eye.

Is that…Theo?

I squinted, trying to get a better look as Theo's familiar figure stepped out of the building and crossed the road, then said into the phone, "Calling a little late, aren't you?"

"Did you get it?"

I was about to answer when Theo's face came into clear view and the building behind him…*exploded*.

"Motherfucker." *What the—*

"You got it," King said. "What the fuck is it?"

I had no clue. But as my brain tried to play catch-up, I hit replay to watch the video again, thinking I had to be mistaken in what I'd seen, but no.

There Theo was. The Prince of Monaco exiting a building. A building that promptly exploded behind him as he casually fled the scene like a fucking villain.

What the fuck was right.

"Do you know anything about this?" King barked as though I should know every move that Theo made.

"Of course not. Do you know who sent it?"

"No, I fucking don't." I could practically hear him grinding his molars as a long, tense silence stretched between us.

"Do you think it's real?"

"It looks pretty real to me, but I'm going to speak to Alessio. I swear…" King let out an aggravated sigh. "If Theo did this, if he went off on his own, I'll…"

King didn't have to say what he was thinking, because I was thinking it too. If Theo had gone and pulled this shit off on his own, I'd kill him myself.

"Leave it with me," I said, watching the video one more time. "I'll talk to him."

"You do that. And Shep?"

"Yeah?"

"If Theo's involved, you are to report directly back to me. Got it?"

Theo's taunt of my being King's lapdog flashed through my head, but before I let it push me into a response I'd regret, I answered, "Got it," then quickly ended the call.

OceanofPDF.com

6

THEO

I WOKE TO a sound I'd never heard before—someone banging on the door to my private wing within the palace.

What the hell? No one bangs *here.* Not unless I brought them to my room, of course, and I hadn't done that last night. I wouldn't have minded a repeat had Shep been down for that, but all our quick fuck had done was wound him tighter than before.

Too bad. He was actually pretty damn hot working me over.

When I didn't hear the noise again, I figured I'd imagined it and rolled back over in bed. Yesterday was the longest day in the history of ever, and I didn't have anywhere to be until later, so unless the palace was burning down or someone had died, I was getting at least another hour of shuteye.

Just as I began to drift off again, my sheets were ripped from my body. The rude awakening sent me into an adrenaline rush, and I had the knife I kept in my bedside table in my hand and at the intruder's throat before they could lay a finger on me.

"Good to know you're prepared in case someone wanted to kidnap your ass for ransom."

I blinked through the haze of sleep at Shep, who didn't flinch even with my knife at his throat.

"Shep? What the fuck?" I lowered the knife and blew out a breath as I tossed it back in the drawer. "I could've killed you."

"You would've tried." He shrugged and threw my sheets back on the bed. "Can't say you would've succeeded."

“Let’s not test that theory.”

“Fine by me. I—” His words cut off as he looked at me, his eyes widening slightly when he realized I was naked.

Instantly, the tension in the room changed to something else entirely as he dropped his gaze down my body, lingering on my morning wood. There had been times in the midst of shit going down where we’d all quick-changed in front of each other, but there had never been a time I’d stood fully naked in front of him, and that included yesterday’s unexpected activity.

Shep liked what he saw. I could see it in the hitch of his breath, the flare of his nostrils, and the way he couldn’t take his eyes off me.

“If you wanted a repeat, you could’ve just joined me,” I said, smirking as I took a step toward him.

Instantly, Shep’s shoulders tensed, and though he didn’t move away, that wall of his was firmly back up.

“Put some clothes on. We need to talk.”

“I’m fine like this.”

“Theo—”

“Is this too tempting for you? Can’t concentrate while you’re ogling my dick?”

“I’m not—” Shep bit back his words and took in a deep breath before meeting my gaze again. “I’m gonna ask you this once, and you need to be honest with me.”

“Yes, I’ll fuck you this time. No need to beg.”

Shep didn’t crack a smile. Instead, he took his phone from his pocket, pulled something up, and then turned it around to face me. As he hit play, he said, “What the fuck is this?”

I recognized the building instantly but was more than a little surprised to see myself walking out of it…only seconds before it exploded.

My brows shot up as the video ended. “Huh. I think I’d remember blowing up a building.”

“Are you saying you didn’t do this?”

“Come on, it’s obviously fake.”

Shep hit play again, and I rolled my eyes as I watched me walk off, and then BAM. The whole thing went up in a cloud of smoke.

“Impressive. What do you think was used? RDX? TNT?”

“This isn’t fucking funny, Theo. What did you do?”

I sputtered out a laugh at his serious look. “You think I did that? Seriously?”

“Are you saying you didn’t?”

“You want me to spell it out for you? No, I didn’t rig explosives in that building to go off only seconds after I walked out of it. I’m not an idiot.” I moved past him, grabbed a pair of jogger pants from the bureau, and took my sweet-ass time pulling them on. Let Shep enjoy the view and the reminder of what we’d done yesterday. I sure hadn’t forgotten, not with the delicious ache I’d be feeling for days.

When he didn’t attack me from behind—*dammit*—I turned back around and crossed my arms.

“Is that why you’re here? To accuse me of starring in a fake video?” I snorted. “Where did you get that shit, anyway?”

“We all got it.”

I didn’t move, didn’t blink. “All of you?”

“Yes. Late last night, and it made it through Alessio’s firewalls, so it’s coming from someone who knew how to get to us.”

“Huh.” That *was* strange, but it just proved there were people out there with too much time on their hands.

Shep moved toward me, slowly, like he was approaching an animal he didn’t want to spook. “So that’s it, then? You weren’t anywhere near this building in the last month?”

I let out a whistle and shook my head. “Wow. Is that what everyone thinks? My own brothers think I’m a hothead blowing shit up?”

“I didn’t say that—”

“But you don’t believe me.” If he did, he wouldn’t be questioning me like he thought I was capable of it. “It’s not me. I don’t know what else to tell you.”

“How about where you were the past couple of weeks?”

“Are you fucking kidding me? I’m not reporting to you like some wandering child. Plus”—I shrugged and walked around the bed to where my phone sat on the charger—“there’s a pretty quick way to verify my whereabouts.”

“Something I’m sure Alessio is looking into. But you could clear it up for me right now by telling me instead of—”

“Making you wait for the tracking data?” I cocked my head to the side as though thinking about it. “How about fuck you?”

“That’s really mature, Theo.”

“Not really what I was aiming for. But next time you talk to Alessio, ask him if there’s anyone out there that can do a deep fake as good as him, because clearly that’s what this is.”

Shep ran a hand through his hair and turned away from me, pacing the length of the room. “Listen, I get it. I’d be pissed if you were all questioning me. But I have to ask.”

“*You* have to?” I scoffed. “More like King is making you. Tell me, do you ever get sick of doing what he tells you?”

Shep whirled around and pinned me with a fulminating stare. “I’m second-in-command, it’s my job—”

“To do whatever he tells you. I know, I get it. But come on, you know I didn’t do this. You think I’d risk blowing my ass up?”

“No, and if it’s a fake—”

“It is.”

“Then Alessio will find out.”

I rubbed a hand over the stubble lining my jaw. I had several royal events lined up later in the day, but wanted to get a workout in before they got underway. Now, with this, I *really* needed to work off some irritation.

“Listen, I’m going to go for a run, if that’s okay with you.”

“A run?”

I grabbed a shirt out of one of my drawers and pulled it on. “Yes. It’s a form of exercise.”

“What about the video?”

“I don’t give a fuck about the video.” I walked over to Shep and looked him dead in the eye. “I told you, it’s fake. Beyond that, it’s not my problem.”

I went to brush by him, and Shep took hold of my arm, halting me. “It sure as fuck *is* your problem.”

“Why? Because King is mad? That’s not really something I worry about much.”

Shep’s eyes narrowed, and I knew I’d hit a nerve. Yes, I respected the hierarchy of our organization and my role in it. But at the same time, I knew what I was looking at wasn’t real. If they wanted to believe otherwise, not much I could do about that.

“Maybe you should.”

“*Non*, I think I’ll leave that to you. You’re so good at it.” I glanced down at where he still held my arm. “Now, unless you’re offering to let me work out my frustration some other way, I’d advise you to let go.”

“That’s never going to happen again.”

“Shame. You could use a good fucking.” I leaned in and added, “And I’d make it *really* good. Explosive…”

Shep’s short nails dug into the skin of my arm—hard. “That’s not funny.”

“Come on, it was a little.”

“You really don’t give a shit how much trouble you’re in, do you?” Shep’s jaw bunched. “That would just make it worse.”

“Hmm, and you wouldn’t want that.” I angled my face up until our lips almost touched.

He let me go with a slight shove then headed for the door, and because I was a total glutton for punishment I called out, “That’s right, run back and report to your King like a good little soldier.”

Shep paused, hand on the door, and for a second I thought—or rather *hoped*—he would turn back and make me pay for that comment. Instead, he gripped the handle and threw it open, storming out without another word.

OceanofPDF.com

7

SHEP

IF I THOUGHT I'd get a reprieve from having to see Theo for the rest of the day, I was wrong. Though he went off to fulfill royal duties for a few hours—which, now that the wedding was over, meant I wasn't required to tag along as babysitter—what I didn't count on was his showing up at the villa afterward. With his skimpy swimsuit in hand. And convincing everyone to join him in the pool.

Why he couldn't go get in his own damn pool was beyond me, because if there was one thing the two of us needed right now, it was space. We'd made a stupid, in-the-moment decision yesterday, and it wasn't going to happen again.

I sat up in the lounge chair by the pool as he, Lucien, and Kai raced each other from one end to the other, and tossed my laptop onto the chair beside me. Work never stopped, but today was just approving the last ad details for next month's issue. When I'd created *Lincoln*, a political entertainment website that catered to making politics accessible to everyone, I didn't think hard copies of a magazine would be feasible—or profitable—but I was happy to be wrong about that.

Even if it did mean pulling double duty when I could've been relaxing.

"I don't think so, Luc. I hit the wall first and you know it." Theo stood up, not even breathless from the exertion of swimming so hard and fast. Water lapped at his waist, and as he reached up to brush his hair back, I couldn't help the way my eyes drifted down his body.

I'd never paid attention before, but now I noticed just how defined every inch of him was. Whipcord lean, he was deceptive. But there was power there, a strength that was hidden under all those sharply chiseled muscles, with a reaction time as quick as a snake's.

Theo was deadly and sexy as hell.

He looked in my direction, and I didn't tear my eyes away from him fast enough, because a knowing smirk tipped his lips.

Fuck me.

"Hey, Shep," he called out, angling his body to face me and showing off an even better view, the instigator. "You were watching. Who hit it first?"

I heard the suggestive tone and prayed to God Lucien hadn't, or I'd have to drown Theo. I wasn't up for murder tonight.

But when Theo shot me a wink, I decided that may be in the cards after all.

"No idea," I said, reaching for my almost-empty glass of whiskey and giving it a swirl before downing the rest.

I had to force myself not to look in Theo's direction, but out of the corner of my eye I saw his hand drift down his taut abs, and I cursed.

We were definitely not happening again. No matter how many winks and suggestive moves he tried or how much my traitorous dick thought it'd be a good idea.

"You just don't want to get on Luc's bad side."

"Luc doesn't have a bad side. You, on the other hand—"

"*Oui?*" Theo cocked his head. "What about *moi*?"

My eyes shifted to where Kai and Lucien were both staring at me with curious expressions. *Fuck.*

"Not everything has to be a competition, Theo."

Theo scoffed. "Says Mr. Overachiever."

I bit back my retort, not about to give him any more ammunition. The air felt tense as it was. The last thing I needed was anyone else picking up on whatever weird chemistry was going on here.

"You're not going to join us?" Kai finally said, breaking the silence, and I almost said yes just to give me something to do other than watch Theo run a towel over his ripped body. But I wasn't about to strip out of my shorts and show everyone what that view was doing to me.

The best thing I could hope for was that he would excuse himself and head inside, or better yet, leave and go back to the palace.

“We’re out of ice.” He shook the empty bucket and looked at me.

“Don’t think I’m going to get you some, Your Serene Highness.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” He rolled his eyes, slipped into his flip-flops, and headed toward the main house, muttering, *“Tu peux te le mettre là où je pense ton ‘Votre Altesse.’”*

I glared at him over my shoulder. When I turned back toward the pool, Lucien was grinning.

“What’d you do to piss him off?”

“Nothing.” I shrugged and got to my feet. “Why?”

“Let’s just say that wasn’t a compliment.”

I didn’t think it was. But I didn’t really care at this point. It was better for the both of us if I was incurring Theo’s wrath rather than his lust. Even if the two had gone hand in hand the last time we’d been alone.

“Shep?”

“Huh?” I walked to the edge of the pool and sat down, slipping my legs into the cool water.

“I asked why he’s pissed at you.”

“I’m guessing it has something to do with the, uh, email we all got.”

Kai moved in to Lucien’s side and kissed his cheek. “I’m going to go… swim a little.”

Lucien aimed a soft smile his way before nuzzling into his neck and making Kai laugh, and I thought how nice it must be to be so in sync with someone. Kai knew the exact moments Lucien needed privacy for his job and never made him feel shitty about it, and Lucien never made Kai feel he was somewhere he shouldn’t be or hearing something he shouldn’t. Like he wasn’t an imposition. Like his needs were just as important as the other person’s. That he wasn’t second to everything else.

“You talked to Theo, then?” Lucien asked as Kai headed toward the other end of the pool.

“I did. It was either me or King, and I’m pretty sure Theo would’ve rather it came from me than a jet-lagged King.”

Lucien grimaced. “I think any of us would prefer you in that scenario. I assume he didn’t take it well?”

“Seemed more annoyed I was questioning him in the first place than by what I was questioning him about.”

“But come on, you don’t actually think it was Theo in the video. I mean, he’s crazy, but he doesn’t show that side to the world. He knows the

stakes.”

“I know. But King is furious, and the video is pretty damning. If it gets out that the Prince of Monaco is running around blowing up buildings for Tyrone Kingston, we’re fucked.”

“If it’s him.”

“*If* it’s him. Exactly. And that’s what I told him. But you know Theo—he flies off the handle, only listens to what he wants and then ignores everything else. Generally the parts about keeping a cool, calm head.”

Lucien chuckled and ran a hand through his slick black hair. “Yeah, I think you’re mistaking him for yourself there. Theo has never had a cool, calm head. More like chaos in a suit. I think what we should be working on is who sent it. Or made it. Concentrate on that, not fighting amongst each other.”

Lucien was right. Working out who’d sent the video was just as important as finding out whether Theo was the one in it. Someone was clearly trying to fuck with us, and sowing this seed of doubt had immediately made us turn our suspicions in house.

But Theo had said it wasn’t him in the video, and until I found out otherwise, I needed to trust him. He was my brother, for fuck’s sake, a fellow King—something I needed to remember even if he was hellbent on irritating me at every given opportunity.

“You’re right, but you know how King is about shit like this. The possibility of our being identified, or Libertine’s being discovered—”

“Isn’t a threat he’d take lightly.”

“Exactly. He wants to get to the bottom of this as quick as possible. To hell with anyone’s feelings.”

“And that’s why he’s the boss.” Lucien shrugged. “He protects us as fiercely as he demands our loyalty.”

That was true, but there were times where King’s expectations were too rigid even for me. Or should I say *especially* for me. That was one of the reasons we’d ended. He’d wanted to keep everything private and professional *all* the time, whereas I wanted more. I wanted a public life with him. But with our both being so recognizable, and having so many secrets, he’d thought it too risky.

Apparently fucking his former TA and student was less of a risk.

Whatever. That was in the past, far behind me. But having to see it day in and day out wasn’t the easiest pill to swallow. And following his orders,

as his second-in-command, was getting harder and harder too.

My phone vibrating in my pocket dragged my thoughts back from the edge. “It’s Alessio,” I said, and got to my feet, eager to know what our resident tech genius had uncovered. I answered the call with a sharp greeting, and Alessio must’ve been feeling the same pressure I was from our illustrious leader, because he didn’t stop to give me shit, just launched into what he’d found.

“Got some info for you on the video. The building’s location is Istanbul.”

Istanbul? What the hell? We didn’t have any current business there.

“But Theo’s tracker shows him in Monaco at the time of the bombing.”

“That’s good, then, right?”

“Usually I’d say yes.” Alessio paused for several seconds. “I’ve looked at this video for hours on end, and there’s no unnatural facial movements, weird lighting, distortions, or inconsistencies.”

“Meaning what, exactly?”

“Meaning this doesn’t look like a deep fake, Shep, and there’s record of an explosion. I don’t know how, but it looks like Theo—”

Alessio didn’t even get his final words out before I cursed and ended the call, because I knew exactly what it looked like, and the only way it was possible.

That sneaky motherfucker…

I pocketed my phone and stormed back toward the house. I heard Lucien call out my name, but I was zeroed in now. Nothing else was distracting me, and nothing was going to stop me from getting the truth.

All I had to do now was find Theo.

OceanofPDF.com

8

THEO

I RUMMAGED THROUGH the fully stocked bar until I found a bottle of cognac that was one of Benoit's favorites, and figured our fellow brother wouldn't mind my indulging in his stash. The villa—as with all of the places we collectively owned around the world—was outfitted with each of our favorites: spare clothes, luxury toiletries, and anything else we'd need *just in case*.

I was grateful in that moment that it included alcohol. I'd seen the way Shep had been staring, *and* the way he'd tried to fight it, and that was an interesting development.

The in-demand bachelor everyone creamed their pants over was having thoughts about going another round with me, and I had to admit I was hoping he'd fall off his high horse and onto my dick. But he was a stubborn ass who didn't do things lightly, so the reality he'd come back for seconds was slim to—

"Theo!"

Shep's voice echoed through the house and had me stopping mid-pour. He didn't sound desperate or needy for an orgasm, unfortunately, more like he wanted to throttle someone with his bare hands.

"Sounds like someone needs a drink," I called back before grabbing a second glass and giving him a healthy pour.

His footsteps were quick and angry, and as he entered the room, I held out one of the glasses for him to take.

"Here," I said. "Take the edge off."

Shep ignored the alcohol, his eyes shooting daggers into mine as he walked over and reached for my arm.

"What are you—" I started, but then he pushed up the cuff at my wrist to reveal a small scar…and I was fucked.

Shep's fingers dug into my wrist to the point of pain, but I didn't flinch, not even when he took a deep breath to steady the sheer fury vibrating off him.

"What the *fuck* have you done, Theo?"

I jerked my arm out of his grasp and set his cognac aside. "It's not what you think."

"No? Because it looks like you took the tracker out of your arm, the one all of us have for our safety. *All* of our safety, you selfish shit. So don't tell me it's not what I think, because I know better."

So this looked pretty bad, but he didn't know that—

"The video wasn't a fake," he continued, taking a menacing step toward me. "It took place in Istanbul, yet somehow your tracker was in Monaco at the time of the bombing. Care to explain that?"

I crossed my arms and leaned back against the counter. "Not really." But I wasn't an idiot; there was no getting around what I'd really done at this point, and I'd just have to suffer through the incoming wrath from all sides.

"Dammit, Theo—"

"Fine," I said, and then grabbed my glass and took a long sip. "I wasn't in Monaco. I was in Istanbul. But I didn't blow up any buildings. Why would I?"

"Oh, we'll get to that later, but for now, why don't you explain what you were doing in Istanbul in the first place?"

I shook my head. "Can't tell you that."

"Come again?"

"Well, I would if you'd take your pants off—"

"Goddammit, is this a joke to you?" Shep shoved my chest, making the edge of the counter dig into my hips. He didn't give me an inch of breathing room as he caged me in, and though I could feel all his rage, it only reminded me of the hate fuck yesterday…and there went my dick. Rising to the occasion with every vitriolic word out of Shep's mouth.

Something might've been seriously wrong with me that I wanted to get off to his wrath. It wasn't my fault he was even hotter with his eyes flashing

and all that fire aimed my way.

“No. But it’s also none of your business.”

“None of my—” Shep let out an exasperated sigh and held his palms up. Then he took a step back. “Okay, you know what? Let’s start over.”

“How about we don’t?” I threw back my cognac and turned to refill my glass.

“Come on, Theo. You’ve got to give me something here.”

“Why?” I glanced over my shoulder to see Shep eyeing me like I’d lost my mind. “It’s not like you’re going to believe me.”

“Then give me a reason to.”

“So you can run off and tell King? No thanks.” I picked up my glass and stared at the amber liquor in the bottom, wondering who the fuck had sent that video and how quick I could track them down.

Then I’d put an end to this once and for all.

Shep moved past me to stand on the other side of the counter. “Look, I’m trying to help you here.”

“Really? It seems more like you’re trying to find out whether or not I betrayed my brothers.”

He opened his mouth, about to say something, but cut himself off.

“Which I *didn’t*, by the way.”

“Then help me understand.” Shep rested his hands on the counter and stared me down. “Give me something, anything.”

“I already did. I was in Istanbul.” I held Shep’s stare as I took another sip of the velvety alcohol and swallowed it down.

If he thought I would break, he was in for a shock. Unlike my other brothers, I didn’t bend the knee—unless it was for something pleasurable.

Yes, I’d been in Istanbul, but I sure as fuck didn’t blow up any building. I was too smart for that, and I resented the implication I’d be so careless. Plus, if I wanted to get rid of someone, I’d never be so *obvious* about it.

“So you were in Istanbul. To do what?”

“Sightsee?”

Shep’s eyes narrowed. “And…?”

“Try the local cuisine? Their kebabs are to die for.”

Shep raised a brow, and I couldn’t help my smirk.

“Sorry. Poor choice of words.”

“Were they? Or did you choose them on purpose?”

I pursed my lips and leaned over the counter. “Are you asking me if someone *died* in Istanbul?”

“Are you trying to tell me someone did?”

My eyes drifted to the stubble surrounding Shep’s lips, and I couldn’t help but wonder what they’d feel like pressed up against mine. Would his kiss be punishing or soft? Or maybe a little of both? If I just moved in a little closer, I could—

“Theo?”

“Huh?”

“Did something go wrong in Istanbul? Did someone…you know? Is that why you don’t want to talk about it?”

Ugh, why is he still talking about this?

I straightened and eyed him as I swallowed the remains of my drink.

“I’m done,” I said, and placed the glass down on the counter with a loud clang. “This has been…annoying. But if you don’t mind, I think I’m going to head home and do what I was trying to do here. Relax.”

“Theo—”

“Look, I have too many family obligations this week to deal with this shit. We’re done, Shep.”

At least with this conversation. If he wanted to revisit other things we might have in common—naked things—I was open to that. But judging by the frown forming between his brows, I knew that wasn’t in the cards.

“Tell Lucien and Kai I said goodnight.”

“This isn’t going to go away just because you want it to,” Shep pointed out as I started down the hall.

“No, but I can.” Then, just because I knew it would piss him off, I added, “Be sure to tell King he can kiss my ass the next time you talk to him.”

OceanofPDF.com

9

SHEP

THE FIRST CALL from King came when I was getting ready to jump in the shower the following morning. After the showdown with Theo, I'd decided not to get in touch with our leader right away, and not because of Theo's insinuation about running off to King with every scrap of information I received.

No, I'd wanted to sit with it for a minute. Theo had removed his tracker, something that could have serious consequences once King knew, and though I wasn't ignorant enough to think he wouldn't eventually find out, I wasn't ready for it to come from me.

I didn't understand Theo's motivations, didn't know why the hell he'd been in Istanbul in the first place or why he felt the need to hide it from us, but what I did know was the seven of us needed unbreakable trust in each other. I had to believe—for now—that his reasons were for good. The possibility he'd work against us was too much to even consider, and I wasn't going to jump the gun here. He'd always been loyal no matter how chaotic he could be—that was part of his strength and charm, after all. So even though he'd done the unthinkable, even though all the signs pointed to trouble, I hesitated.

Something wasn't adding up, and until Theo came clean, I wouldn't add fuel to King's fire.

As I toweled off, I glanced down at a notification lighting up my phone. Seven missed video calls, and several texts were waiting for me. I sighed

before running the towel over my hair and then wrapping it around my waist.

Let's get this over with.

I glanced in the mirror, noting I needed a shave at some point today, and then reached up to fix my errant strands of hair into something that wasn't a mess.

Not that I needed to bother looking decent for King—not anymore. This was about self-preservation.

Biting back a sigh, I headed out of the en suite and into my room and hit his number. He answered immediately, the phone barely ringing before that intense face filled the screen.

"Ignoring my calls?"

"I was in the shower."

"How long are your damn showers?"

Somehow I resisted the urge to say something assholish about the fact that his were probably three times as long now with the company he was keeping, but that wasn't my business, and I didn't want him to think I gave a shit.

"What's the emergency?" I said as I headed to the large windows and opened up the curtains. Even without the view of the water, it was a stunning sight, and a welcome juxtaposition to King's mood.

"Have you spoken to Theo?"

"Have *you*?"

"Would I be calling if I had? He's straight to voicemail."

"Well, it's been a big week for him." I settled into the recliner by the window and forced myself to look at the screen instead of what was beyond it.

"I've already spoken to Alessio, and he said the video's not fake, but Theo was in Monaco. How the fuck does that happen?"

No doubt he had his suspicions, and if I were the good little soldier Theo said I was, I would've confessed it all to King right then and there.

But something was holding me back, some instinct, as stupid as it probably was, to protect Theo. Not that he needed it; the guy could hold his own. It just didn't feel like my place to tell, at least not until I knew more.

"Your guess is as good as mine," I said. "Did Alessio have any theories?"

“Not that he’s letting on, but he’s still looking into a few things.” The rigid set to King’s jaw spoke volumes. He was pissed, and if there was one thing he hated, it was not being in control of any situation.

Theo going rogue? Not a good thing.

The sound of voices in the background took King’s attention away from the camera, and I caught a glimpse of Zac and East in the background of the bedroom. The same one I’d shared with him, but it didn’t look the same anymore. The walls had been painted a different color, the bed had been changed to a much bigger one, and the pictures by the bedside had three faces in them now.

“You need to bring him to me,” King said, drawing my focus back to him.

“Theo’s in the middle of royal wedding duties and you want me to bring him to New York now? I don’t think that’s gonna work.”

“That wasn’t a suggestion.”

“And I hear you, but you’re the one who wanted me to make sure he was here. Now you want me to make him leave? The press will have a field day.”

“The wedding’s over.”

“The celebrations aren’t. You know as well as I do that people will start to talk if he doesn’t make an appearance. There’s already rumors he and Jean have a strained relationship. Let’s not make it worse.”

“So you think getting to the bottom of this isn’t more important?”

“I didn’t say that. Give it some time.”

“We may not have time. We still don’t know who sent the video in the first place—”

“And how will Theo help with that?”

King snapped his mouth shut and scowled, but he knew I had a point. Alessio was the tech genius here, the only one of us capable of tracking down the sender. If I were King, I’d have questions for Theo too, but now wasn’t the time.

“So what do you suggest? He just goes on his merry way without answering for his actions?”

“How do you know they’re *his* actions? Didn’t you just say Alessio is still looking into it?”

“Yes, but—”

“Then don’t you think we should wait until we have a definitive answer as to who sent it and what their motives are? We know Theo, we know his character—”

“Which is half the problem.”

“—and we know he wouldn’t do anything this insane. There has to be some other explanation.”

“Which is why I want to talk to him. You need to work out a way to bring him to me.”

“No.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me. I said no. You told me to talk to him, and that’s what I’m doing. Don’t you trust me?”

It was a low blow, I knew that. I was King’s most trusted ear, unless you counted the two who shared his bed.

“You know I do.”

“Then let me do my job. After all, that’s why you kept me around, right?”

A flash of emotion flickered in King’s eyes before he rubbed a hand over his face. “Shep…”

“Don’t,” I snapped. The last thing I needed was a pity pep-talk from him.

Damn it, why’d I let him get to me like that? I hated him seeing any cracks in my armor, and when it came to Tyrone Kingston, I had a lot.

Time to change the subject.

“I’ll work on Theo; you work on Alessio. I’ll check in when I have something useful.”

King’s eyes narrowed a fraction. I was ready to be done with this conversation.

“Fine. Why don’t I send Lachlan your way and—”

I snorted. “Lachlan? I don’t think so. He’d stick out like a sore thumb. I can keep an eye on Theo just fine on my own—I run in his circles, and if I need a second, Lucien’s here. We blend. Lachlan wouldn’t.”

“Okay, then I’ll wait to hear from you.”

And hate every second of it. “I’ll be in touch.”

I was just about to end the call when he said, “Shep?”

“Yeah?”

“Be careful.”

“Will do.”

I sat in the chair a spell after ending the call, replaying the conversation with King over and over again.

God, why did he still have such a pull on me? At work, on my own, during our conversation. Theo was right—I was like a fucking soldier, always getting in line to serve my King.

No, not mine anymore.

Never mine again.

And while I thought I’d gotten over him, my lack of romantic involvement since said otherwise.

I couldn’t remember the last person I’d been with—not including Theo—and wasn’t *that* pathetic? King had moved on, and moved *in,* with his new men, and I was in some kind of Groundhog Day from hell.

One I hadn’t even realized I was in until Theo had pointed it out.

And fuck him for that. Who was Theo to give me dating advice? He hadn’t held down a relationship of any kind since I’d known him. But then again, after one close encounter with him, and having to put up with his mouth, I could see why people would run.

The guy was a lot. And that was before you added in the fact he was royalty and under constant public scrutiny.

The wild card of Monaco royalty. He’d been under as much scrutiny as I had during our teens and early twenties. But where I’d made sure to behave myself, Theo had taken a more rebellious road in life. One that involved drinking and debauchery.

We thought we’d gotten that wild side of him under control. But knowing what lengths he’d gone to in order to stay under Alessio’s radar, I couldn’t help but wonder—could you ever really contain lightning in a bottle?

I had no idea, but sitting around thinking about it wasn’t going to get me anywhere, and if I didn’t come up with something soon, King would be paying us an impromptu visit—and no one wanted that.

It was time to track Theo down and get to the bottom of this. Or at least find him and make sure he wasn’t causing another international incident for me to clean up.

OceanofPDF.com

10

THEO

SINCE TODAY'S ROYAL event was strictly a friends-and-family, no-photographers-allowed *fête champêtre*, I was able to indulge without incurring anyone's wrath for not being a perfect prince for show.

Not that I gave a damn. But it *was* easier to drink limitless amounts of champagne and hit the dance floor as many times as I liked without photographic evidence hitting the front pages the next day.

A group of Katerina's bridesmaids gathered at the bar beside me, rehydrating after I'd led them all in a round of who-can-drop-it-lower to KC and the Sunshine Band's "Get Down Tonight."

And the answer to that was *me*. No contest.

"It was such a beautiful wedding," Katerina's maid of honor, Dani, said, hugging her glass to her chest. "Like a fairytale. Didn't you think so, Theo?"

"Oh yes," I said, sarcasm dripping into my almost-empty flute as I finished it off. "Glorious."

"It'll be the same when you decide to get married," the brunette beside her added. "The whole country will go all out. I bet it'll be even bigger than this one."

That was not where my head was, but I decided to go along with it anyway. "You think so?"

"Definitely. Jean's great, but he's a little more…" She bit her lip and looked at her friends for help.

"Stick-up-his-ass?" I offered.

Her brows shot up in surprise. “Uh, no. More—”

“Mind-numbingly boring?”

They all laughed in a tentative way, like they weren’t sure if they should be mocking their friend’s choice in partner, especially since he’d soon be the head of state.

“More…serious, is all,” Dani said.

“But speaking of serious,” a woman who’d kept quiet until now piped up, eyes glittering, “are you seeing anyone?”

“And give the masses a reason to stop lusting after me?” I teased, and lifted my glass to the bartender for a refill.

“Is that what you think people are doing?” a male voice said behind me, one so familiar that even if I didn’t know it instantly, the looks of shock and awe on the girls’ faces would’ve tipped me off.

Shep lifted a flute of champagne off a passing waiter’s tray and moved in beside me, and instantly my entire body warmed.

I hadn’t been expecting him today, and I was tipsy enough to admit he looked really, *really* good, so debonair in a navy suit so perfectly tailored to him that it molded to his body like a second skin. Where I preferred a more “undone” look for myself, everything about Shep was classic and buttoned up, but that didn’t diminish his appeal.

No, his mouth did that. Especially when he greeted the ladies and then gave me a sardonic smile before saying, “Was that last move on the dance floor part of what has everyone lusting after you, or were you doing that to keep them from swarming you?”

The girls chuckled freely at that, but I could only wonder what the hell Shep was doing here. Even though he’d been invited, his response to me had been “hell fucking no” to all activities other than the wedding he’d been required to attend, so his presence here told me he had *reasons*, and none of them were good.

Merde.

I ignored his attempt at an insult and winked. “Shep here is just jealous his hips don’t move that way. He’s like a ninety-year-old with arthritis, poor guy.” I patted his cheek, and he caught my wrist before quickly dropping it.

He gave the girls a polite smile. “Ladies, do you mind if I take Theo off your hands for a moment?”

“Not at all,” Dani said, waggling her brows. “Have at him.”

The double meaning of her words went over Shep's head—or he simply chose to ignore it. As we headed off to a secluded spot by the trees, I grabbed Shep's glass of champagne for myself.

Double-fisting it. I was classy as hell. But he wasn't here for anything good, so alcohol was required.

Sure enough, as he turned toward me, his default all-too-serious expression was back on that handsome face. It was a shame someone so attractive and scowling had such full, perfect lips.

Even more of a shame I was noticing them now.

"Nope," I said, shaking my head before he could say a word. "We're not doing this today."

"This?"

"Yes, whatever *this* is that you came here to lecture me on, I'm not here for it. Not right now, not today—not doing it."

Shep cocked his head. "And you think that's your decision because…?"

"Because right now, here, I am your superior." *Oh yes, I like the sound of that.* "Here I am the Prince of Monaco, and you are my guest. Therefore, you have to do what *I* want."

"First off, I'm your brother's guest, and second"—Shep took a step forward, backing me up against the tree—"I am *always* your superior."

Putain. I liked the sound of that even better.

"You agreed to that when you took your oath at Libertine," he added.

I brought my glass to my lips and took a sip. "Careful, you get much closer and Dani and her friends will think you're going to *have at me* after all."

As if he just realized how intimate our stance was, Shep took a step back. It seemed he couldn't help but get closer to me these days.

That was a new development, but not a wholly unexpected one, considering he'd had a taste of me now. I was rather irresistible.

"No fear of that happening."

"No? So you just keep showing up for the festivities, then?" I pursed my lips. "That doesn't seem like you. The serious Shepard Winchester the *third*. Methinks you are showing up to see *moi*."

"Because you're keeping secrets."

I grinned over the rim of my glass. "Lucky for you that I know how, right? Wouldn't want anyone to find out Jean and Katerina weren't the only two joined in the church that day."

“Jesus Christ—”

“Yes, he was there too.”

“You need to stop drinking.” Shep went to reach for my second glass, but I pulled it out of his reach.

“*Au contraire.* You need to start drinking more. Come on, Shep. Loosen up a little.”

His jaw bunched. “I don’t have time to loosen up. I need to—”

“Do what you’re told, I know.” I pushed off the tree and sidled a little closer to him. “But remember how much fun you had when you did what you *wanted* instead?”

Shep licked along his lower lip, and I wasn’t sure if it was the alcohol, the festivities, or the man himself, but my dick immediately took notice.

When did he get so fucking hot?

“And you think I want to do you?”

“Ouais, je crois tu as envie de me baiser.” I didn’t mean to say it in French, but when my brain left the building and lust took over, I couldn’t seem to help myself. And something about the way Shep’s eyes darkened at my words had every single nerve ending firing.

“What’d you just say?” His voice was gravel rough and made my balls tingle.

“Why? Did it turn you on?” When he didn’t deny it, I knew I was right, and I had just enough alcohol buzzing through my system to make me stupid. *“Est-ce que ça t'a fait bander?”*

His eyes flared with definite interest. I glanced down his body, and he was as hard as I now was.

“I see it did.” I tossed my empty glass to the grass and put my hand on his lapel, angling my body so no one could see. “Take me inside.”

“Are you crazy?”

“No, but I’m as hard as you are and really want to fuck.”

“Theo…” Shep glanced over my shoulder to where the picnic-goers were blissfully unaware of the sexual tensions crackling between the two of us.

“What? You’re hard too. I can see it.” I moved even closer to him and slid my hand down to cover the erection straining his zipper. “And I can feel it.”

Shep sucked in a breath, but again didn’t deny it or shove my hand away.

“Take me inside.”

“No fucking way.”

“Scared?”

He grunted as I squeezed. “Smart. Once is a mistake. Twice is a habit.”

“Well, you did accuse me of having bad habits. Want to become my next one?”

Shep finally reached down and took hold of my wrist. “Cut it out.”

“Mais je ne veux pas.”

He shoved my hand away from him, and I decided to see if I could lure him inside. I mean, he *was* here to watch over me. Where I went he would follow, right?

“I don’t know about you, but I’ve had about enough socializing for today,” I said. “I think I might retire for the afternoon.”

“You’re just going to leave?”

“*Oui*. I put in an appearance, smiled, and shook hands with those I needed to, and if you aren’t going to take me inside and relieve me of the ache *you* caused, I might go and find someone else to do the job for me. Maybe at one of the clubs in town.”

I turned and headed toward the palace, leaving Shep to gnaw on that little morsel. Not two seconds after I was inside, I heard Shep’s familiar march of disapproval behind me.

“Theo,” he called out, and I ignored him. “*Theo*. We are not done talking.”

I rolled my eyes but kept going. Talking was the last thing I was interested in doing with Shep.

When his hand clamped around my wrist and he pulled me into one of the many alcoves in the main hall, I cursed and rounded on him.

“What? Did you change your mind? Want a second go around after all?”

“I want to talk to you about why you took your tracker out before traveling to another country.”

I contemplated that for a moment. “Did you tell King you were sorry for not noticing earlier?”

“What?”

“About my taking my tracker out. I mean, you probably should’ve noticed when you were fucking my brains out, or maybe when I was naked in my room and you barged in. But it’s nice to know you’re not perfect, and get just as distracted by a tight ass and big dick as I do.”

Shep growled and stormed forward until I had no choice but to back up into the shadows of the alcove.

"Your mouth is going to get you in trouble one of these days," he said as he loomed over me.

"Pourquoi est-ce que tu ne fourres pas ta queue dans ma bouche pour me faire taire."

"Stop. Speaking. French."

I chuckled, his irritation turning me on even more. "Make me."

And what do you know—he did.

OceanofPDF.com

11

SHEP

THEO WAS MADDENING on a good day, but right now that mouth had pushed me past my limits. If he wanted me to shut him up so badly, he could do it on his knees.

I glanced up and down the hall and spotted a door across from us, so I shoved him through it.

All I saw before shutting us into the small space was an infuriating smirk on Theo's lips, and then the room went dark.

"I didn't think it would be you forcing us back into the closet—" he started before I gripped his jaw, cutting him off.

"I told you," I said, flicking open the button of my pants with my free hand and shoving down the zipper, "to shut the fuck up. And since you can't seem to do that"—I pushed him down onto his knees in front of me —"suck it."

Theo's face brushed against my erection behind my boxer briefs as he settled in at my feet, and even though the room was dark, with only a small stream of light from the bottom of the door, I slammed my eyes shut.

I shouldn't be doing this. *We* shouldn't be doing this.

But I'd already opened Pandora's box once—what difference did a second time make?

Theo's warm breath heated my dick as he traced me with his mouth, sending a shot of lust through my body that had me reaching out to steady myself on the wall, preparing for the onslaught.

“If you’re going to imagine someone else’s mouth getting you off, I won’t waste my time.”

I opened my eyes and looked down to faintly see Theo sitting back on his heels, no longer touching me.

I blinked, trying to bring him more into focus. “What the fuck?”

“Keep your eyes open and on me,” he said. “Wouldn’t want you mistaking me for King.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” He shifted back up to his knees and curled his fingers beneath the band of my briefs. “Eyes on me.”

I growled as his taunts hit their mark and reminded me of why we shouldn’t be doing this in the first place.

King.

He was always there, but fuck, he shouldn’t be. It wasn’t like I wanted him anymore, not after the epic rejection and everything that had transpired since. He just lingered in my head and in my body, an ex-lover I couldn’t seem to shed.

Maybe that was exactly why I needed this forbidden moment with Theo. I wasn’t with anyone. Neither was he. We were both unattached, horny as hell, and in the same place at the same time. And after my last conversation with King—fuck him.

My jaw tensed as I narrowed my eyes down at the man on his knees, freeing my aching cock and waiting for my answer.

But I was done talking.

I reached down and gripped his jaw, applying enough pressure that his lips parted, then I shoved forward, sliding in deep and hard. One sure thrust and I was at the back of his throat, and Theo—that greedy bastard—swallowed me down like he’d been waiting for me.

He’d been pushing me at every opportunity, goading me into this very moment. And as I stared down at the thick hair swept back from his angular face, I realized it had only been a matter of time.

Theo was a stunningly attractive man—not one I’d ever allowed myself to look at, not that way, but there was a reason he was on the top fifty bachelor lists right alongside me.

The only problem with this handsome royal was that he was a royal fucking nightmare. Whether it be his actions, his mouth, or his give-no-fucks attitude, Theo was an itch I shouldn’t be scratching.

Why couldn’t I have gone and found some nice single guy at a club for the night? Hell, a nice single guy at the *wedding*? Instead, I’d hooked up with the one person I shouldn’t. The one person who was…

…sucking my dick like he’d win a medal for his performance.

Theo wrapped a hand around my cock while he used the other to rub between his own legs, and damn, I wanted to watch that. I wanted to see him get himself off while he got me off.

Knowing we didn’t have much time, I slid my fingers into the longer strands of his hair and drew his lips off me.

“Take your cock out,” I ordered him, my breathing ragged as I stared down at the picture he made kneeling at my feet.

Theo’s lips were wet and swollen, his eyes dark and dilated. He looked sexy, sinful, and I could see the buzz of alcohol in his flushed cheeks and wicked smirk.

He reached for his pants, and seconds later had his dick in hand. “This what you want?”

Fuck yes it was, but I wasn’t about to tell him that. Not when it would give him the upper hand. He needed no encouragement. Not when my hard-on was glistening from being between his lips.

Instead, I twisted my fingers in his hair and brought him up to his knees.

“What I *want*, Your Serene Highness,” I said, and leaned down over him, “is to fuck your mouth until it can no longer talk.” I grazed my mouth over his and promised, “Then I’m going to watch you swallow every last drop of my cum.”

Theo’s lips curved under mine. “Controlling fuck.”

“And your dick says you love every goddamn second of it.” I straightened, took hold of my cock, and directed it to his mouth. “Now get to work.”

Theo didn’t hesitate—he parted his lips, flicked his tongue over my wide, sensitive head, and groaned as the taste of my arousal flooded his senses.

“You even taste expensive, you high-maintenance fucker.”

“Says the man who lives in a castle.”

Theo’s wild eyes flicked up to mine as he swirled the tip of his tongue over my leaking slit. “That turn you on?”

“No.” My balls tingled as I stared down into his twinkling eyes. “But you do. Suck me.”

There was no waiting after that. He wrapped his fingers around the base of my shaft and swallowed me, and my eyes slammed shut.

Christ. The tight, wet suction made my toes curl. He took me so deep I hit the back of his throat, and when he pulled away, dragging his lips along my hard-on, a string of curses left me.

I'd known he would be good. Hell, if there was one thing Theo was known for, it was his mouth, and I'd had no doubt it would be just as good at sucking me off as it was pissing me off. But I hadn't been prepared for what a rush it would be to stuff it full, watching him struggle to take more.

With a hand braced on the wall, I used the one I had at the back of his head to set the pace, and Theo relaxed his jaw and let me have at him. One rough thrust after the other, I fucked his mouth like I'd never find a hotter, tighter hole—which wasn't true, because I knew if I turned him around and slid inside him, I'd have difficulty deciding which place I wanted to bury myself in more.

But at this particular moment, his mouth was the place I planned to lose myself in. I glanced down to where he was madly stroking his own dick, fucking his fist at the same pace I was fucking his lips, and that had my climax racing down my spine.

I wasn't sure what was going on with me, or if it was Theo himself that had me acting this way, but he wasn't wrong when he'd called me an animal. Every time our clothes had come off I'd been on him in seconds, and the control I was usually so good at employing went right out the fucking window.

Not that there were any windows in this particular room. In fact, I had no idea where I'd dragged Theo for this latest moment of insanity. But as I shoved past his lips and heard a strained, choking sound that turned to a groan, my eyes locked onto the mouth stretched wide around me.

I took a mental snapshot of Theo's wet lips and began to slide in and out of them at a faster pace. His eyes watered at the strain.

For a second I wondered if it was too much for him, if I was going too hard, but when his arm began to move even faster between his legs, I knew he was as into this as I was.

Theo had always loved shit a little rough. That was why we'd always kept him on such a short leash. On missions, he was to never go in alone. He had impulse control issues out the ass. Something that was an issue

when you were giving orders regarding whether or not to take some asshole's life.

But here and now, as he reveled in the burn, the pain that my rough handling was delivering, I found it dared my edgier side to come out and play. He could take it, he wanted it, and I was more than happy to let him have it.

As that thought slammed into me, I gave a final thrust forward into that deviant mouth, and, seeming to understand exactly what point I was at, Theo tightened his lips and began to suck—hard.

My cock pulsed, my balls drew tight, and seconds later I squeezed my eyes shut and came in a hot rush down the Prince of Monaco's throat like it was my goddamn right.

Fuck.

My fingers flexed against the wood paneling of the wall as I tried to catch my breath. Not the easiest thing to do when you just had your brain sucked out your dick. But when Theo drew his mouth off me, I opened my eyes and looked down to see him swiping his thumb along his lower lip.

"I think you might've broken my jaw."

I snorted, despite myself. "Now *that* would be hard to explain to the public."

"Not really," he said as he got to his feet. "I'd just tell them how hard you went at me with your big—"

I pushed off the wall and reached for his spent cock, and Theo immediately stopped talking.

"I didn't hear you complain."

He sucked in a breath as I ran my fingers over its sticky head. "Like I could say anything with your dick halfway down my throat."

The memory of that was almost as powerful as the moment I'd lost control. "But this," I said, and brought my fingers to my lips to taste him, "says you didn't mind."

"I can show you how *much* I didn't mind, if you give me another few minutes."

I knew my answer should be no. That I should tell him we'd gone too far and done too much already. But it was getting to a point now where I was done trying to fool myself into thinking this was an accident.

There was something going on here. A strange attraction that had been unlocked and was becoming more and more difficult to deny.

Was it anger? Frustration? Lust? I wasn't sure.

But one thing I did know—I'd enjoyed every second of it, so why shouldn't I continue?

Both of us were unattached, and while it was frowned upon and an unspoken rule that we shouldn't hook up with a fellow King, who ever said that was set in stone? The only reason it became an issue was because King had tossed my ass aside.

But that was different. *This* was just two single guys scratching an itch. There were no feelings involved, and once we left here, that would be that.

Fuck King's rules.

OceanofPDF.com

12

THEO

"IF YOU KEEP getting naked with me, I'm gonna start to think you like me." I flicked my fingers along the surface of the water, sending a spray across the hot tub at Shep.

After I'd gotten a mouthful of Shep in the closet, I'd suggested skipping the rest of what was essentially a glorified picnic, and he was quick to agree. How we'd ended up in the hot tub in my private garden I was a little fuzzy on, but in my defense, I'd had more glasses of champagne than I could count on one hand. Maybe two.

"Really, Theo?" Shep wiped at his cheek and shook his head. "You live to make me regret my choices, don't you?"

"It does have a certain appeal. But are you really regretting spending a glorious evening relaxing? I doubt you do it often."

It looked like he was about to refute that, but then snapped his mouth shut and reached for his champagne from the deck.

Getting Shep to indulge in anything was a win in my book, and as I watched him take a long sip, I couldn't help but admire him. It wasn't just his personality that was a bit tight, it was his entire body, all those muscles perfectly lean and toned in a way that spoke of years of dedication in the gym. He'd mentioned working out with his father's Secret Service detail in the past, so it wasn't surprising that Shep's body was a work of art. What *was* surprising was how massive his di—

A spray of water hit me square in the face, rudely cutting off my fantasies of Shep's cock in my mouth.

“Hey!”

“You were staring.” He shrugged, looking unrepentant, and continued sipping his champagne. His usually sandy-brown hair looked almost black all wet and slicked back from his face, which showcased a sharp jaw and those hypnotic, ice-blue eyes that were usually narrowed when he was looking in my direction.

“Not my fault when *tu es bâti comme un dieu.”*

Shep growled. “Theo…”

I smiled, appreciating the fact that he knew a few pleasantries in French and nothing more. It had to drive him crazy not to understand me, which was why Benoit and I bitched together in French during Libertine meetings.

Maybe I did live to piss him off, but I couldn’t help myself. I was discovering a riled-up Shep was sexy as hell.

I stood up and reached for the bottle of Dom, filling up my glass and then doing the same to the one Shep held. He didn’t protest, which was another win, and as I sank back down to let the jets do their work on my back, I tipped my flute to keep my buzz going.

“We need to talk.”

Jesus. Four words that never failed to kill a mood. “Shep, don’t be a buzzkill. We’re having a good night.”

“We need to talk about the realities of your situation.”

“*My* situation,” I scoffed, and rolled my neck, the soft cracks releasing all my tension. “I love how some asshole pinning an incident on me is now *my* situation.”

“But you were there.”

My eyes flew open. “Let it go.”

“Can’t do that.”

“You could. You just won’t. We both know why.”

Shep worked his jaw and looked away as he twisted the stem of the flute between his fingers. “He demanded I bring you to him.”

I sputtered out a laugh, but Shep didn’t crack a smile.

“Wait, you’re serious?”

He nodded, still not looking at me.

The fucking audacity. I respected the hell out of King and would do anything for him, but his request to Shep pissed me off. All this talk about how I needed to be here for the wedding and all the required events so that

we could maintain a good relationship with my family, and *this* was when he wanted me brought out to see him? He couldn't just call instead?

Then again, Shep wasn't exactly forcing my ass on a private plane right now.

"You told him no," I said, not bothering to hide the surprise in my voice. Shep never said no to King's orders, ever.

He lifted a shoulder, continuing to stare out at the manicured hedges that enclosed my corner of the palace. When he didn't deny my remark, I felt my jaw drop and set my drink aside.

"Hold on. King gave you a demand and you said 'fuck off with that'? Holy shit."

"I didn't tell him to fuck off," he said, rolling his eyes, but the gist of that conversation was clear: Shep had defied an order.

"Why?" The word was out of my mouth before I could stop it. "Why aren't we halfway to New York by now?"

"You have duties."

"And?"

"And Alessio's looking into it. We don't have a clear idea of who sent the video and why yet."

"But King doesn't believe me, does he? Shep?"

He finally met my eyes, but they were unreadable, like he had an impenetrable wall up behind them no one could get past.

"Well, nice to know our illustrious leader has such faith in me."

"It's not that—"

"Then what is it?" I leaned my head back on the edge of the tub. "From where I'm sitting, it seems he thinks I'm a liability. And if that's the case—"

"He just wants to hear from you that what he's seeing isn't *actually* what he's seeing. The fact you won't pick up a phone and talk to him about it doesn't look good, Theo."

"And justify what this lunatic, whoever he is, did? Why would I do that?"

"To get King off your back."

I lifted my head and aimed a sultry smile Shep's way. "Last time I checked, it was you on my back, not King."

Shep raised a brow. "I walked right into that one, didn't I?"

“You do make it easy to get a rise out of you.” My eyes dropped to the bubbles and what they hid below his waist.

“Flirting with me isn’t going to make your problems go away.”

“It will right now.” I placed my glass on the deck of the tub and pushed off my seat to swim Shep’s way, and no one was more shocked than me when he didn’t stop me. “And that’s all I’m currently worried about.”

As I moved closer, Shep widened his legs. When I slid between them, he stretched his arms out along the edge of the tub.

Away from temptation? Probably. We both knew if his hands got too close, they were going to touch me.

“What are you doing?”

“What’s it look like I’m doing?” I said as I walked my fingers up his chest. I had no problem touching him.

“It looks like you’re trying to distract me.”

“Really?” I looped my arms around his neck and teased the wet hair at the nape. “Because from where I’m standing, I thought it would be obvious I want a cock rub.”

Shep’s lips quirked as he shifted on his seat and—*mon Dieu*—rubbed his hard-on against mine. “Like that?”

The rumble of pleasure that vibrated out of me was answer enough. But just in case he didn’t get it, I leaned back and arched my hips forward, grinding along his covered cock. “*Just* like that.”

Shep set his glass down and slipped his hands under the water, and the next thing I knew he was pulling me in close and cradling my ass.

“And after you finish getting off on me?” he asked, his lips hovering over mine. “Then what? Your problem is still there.”

My eyes drifted down to the mouth I’d recently become obsessed with, and I couldn’t remember what problem he was talking about, because the only one I had right then was the fact his lips weren’t on mine.

“Theo?”

“Huh?”

Shep smirked then leaned in to say by the corner of my lips, “You want my tongue in your mouth?”

“Fuck yes,” I said without an ounce of shame, and when he slid his tongue along my lower lip, I groaned and opened for him.

Shep pushed inside with the same force he did everything else. He was aggressive, demanding, and made every thought other than the taste of him

vanish from my mind.

I'd been imagining this kiss ever since we'd come together before my brother's wedding, and as Shep's tongue swept inside and rubbed up against mine, I realized I'd greatly underestimated the impact it would have.

If I thought his body phenomenal, his commanding use of mine addictive, then his mouth was downright intoxicating.

I was fucked.

But I wasn't going to think about that now. *Non*, there'd be plenty of time to worry about the implications of that later. For now, I was going to take what Shep was all too willing to give.

I ran my fingers through the back of his hair and twisted them in the damp strands as I moved up to straddle his body. When I seated myself in his lap, Shep growled and took hold of my hips, thrusting up against me.

"Fucking hell, Theo."

I moaned and tipped my head back, reveling in the feel of his body under mine as Shep pressed kisses up my neck to my jaw. He scraped his teeth along it, then licked the condensation off my skin as he moved his way up to my ear.

"Just checking your jaw isn't really broken," he said, reminding me of just how hard he'd gone at my mouth earlier.

I turned my head and nipped at his lip. "Good as new. Want to try again?"

Shep chuckled. "As tempting as that is…"

"Oui?"

"I think I should get back to the mansion."

"Seriously?"

"Yes, seriously. Despite your attempts to distract me, there's still the underlying issue of—"

"Don't say it," I groaned.

"—the video."

And just like that, my cock deflated. "Really, Shep, if you weren't interested in round two, you could've just said so."

He pulled me roughly against him, his erection proving that was *definitely* not the case. "And I think you need to be more concerned with the fact that someone is trying to fuck with you."

"Not the person I want."

"Theo…"

“What if I promise to deal with it tomorrow? You get naked with me now, and tomorrow I’ll track this motherfucker down.”

Shep started to laugh, a deep, throaty sound that made a delicious shiver run up my spine.

Putain, *even his laugh is fucking hot?*

“Don’t you have family obligations?” he asked. “Plus, how would you go about tracking this person down? Interrogate everyone who has it out for you?” He raised a brow. “That’ll take years.”

“Hilarious.”

“I’m just being honest. You need to go about your business like nothing has changed and let *Alessio* narrow shit down. Not run around questioning all your enemies.”

I knew he was right. Plus, most of my enemies were unavailable for questioning. I didn’t do well with double crossers, which was what made this so infuriating. Who the fuck had I let slip through my fingers?

“Fine,” I said, sliding off his lap and moving back to my side of the tub. “And I suppose you need to go and do Libertine business?”

Shep inclined his head and rose to his feet, and I almost missed his “I do,” because Jesus H. *Christ*, the man was built like a fucking god. One that currently had water trailing down every sharp angle of his cut physique.

“Theo?”

“Huh?”

“Try not to get into any trouble, would you?”

Then he had to go and open his mouth. He was acting like I needed to be monitored twenty-four seven.

I was an adult, for God’s sake. A member of the royal family. I could handle myself just fine, and had been for all these years.

But just for that little dig, I had to get in one of my own.

I picked up the bottle of Dom and refilled my glass, and as Shep slipped into a robe and belted it, I called out, “I make no promises.”

The satisfaction I felt when his shoulders stiffened was almost as good as my orgasm earlier. He glanced over his shoulder, and I saluted him with my glass.

With a final shake of his head, he muttered, “Fucker,” and walked out the door.

OceanofPDF.com

13

SHEP

WHILE THE TWO lovebirds, Lucien and Kai, headed back to Manhattan the next day, I stayed at Villa Monaco to keep an eye on things.

Specifically Theo.

I'd neglected to hand over that information to him last night, and he hadn't asked, so he had no clue I was still down the road and not thousands of miles away.

I stepped into the walk-in closet to choose from one of the many tailored suits I kept here, but my steps faltered as the memory of Theo down on his knees in a space much smaller than this one flashed before my eyes.

Even though I'd barely been able to see him, I remembered those mischievous eyes locking on mine as he sucked me so hard and deep that I'd forgotten all the reasons why indulging in this way was a bad idea. Because it was, a huge fucking mistake I'd probably regret eventually…but I couldn't say I hadn't enjoyed it.

And what happened in Monaco would stay in Monaco.

I dressed and headed downstairs to where our chauffeured Bentley waited to whisk me off to today's royal event. With the newly betrothed prince off on his honeymoon, today was the first day Theo would be stepping into Jean's shoes as the representative of the royal family. Could he pull it together and be charming and professional for a couple of hours? Absolutely. Was I about to risk it, considering everything else going on at the moment? Absolutely not.

We headed toward the Rock of Monaco, a promontory that overlooked the Mediterranean Sea and was the oldest district in the principality. Several of the most important monuments were located there, including Theo's family home, the Prince's Palace.

But that wasn't where we were going today. Instead the car pulled up to the Oceanographic Museum, or *Musée océanographique de Monaco*, where a horde of press stood on either side of the entrance waiting to snap a photo of anyone they deemed worthy.

I took in a deep breath and slowly let it out, preparing myself for the shift I needed to make when I stepped out of the car. There'd be no sneaking past the photographers, unfortunately, and while I didn't have an official invite, no one was going to deny my entrance.

The door opened, and as soon as I stepped out of the vehicle and buttoned my jacket, the commotion began. Surprise filtered through the group at my unexpected arrival, and when the flashes began, I smiled and waved, making my way up to the building quickly while still giving them the shots they needed.

It wasn't that I minded—after all, this was the life I'd been born into, so it wasn't like I had a choice. Being a known person to a large majority of the world wasn't necessarily a bad thing. There were far more benefits to my position than not, but I couldn't deny the downsides had taken their toll.

Not everyone wanted to be with someone in the public eye.

"Mr. Winchester, what a surprise and delight." Amaya, one of the royal family's most trusted advisors, shook my hand and gestured for me to join her. "If I'd known you were coming, I would've sent a car."

"No, this one's on me. I apologize for dropping in, but I couldn't resist seeing the new exhibit before I leave."

"C'est magnifique," she said, nodding as she led us through the palatial vestibule. To say the building was grand was an understatement, and it was one of my favorite places to visit when I was on this side of the world. "Theo will be happy to have your support. He didn't say it, but I think he was a bit anxious about the opening today."

Theo, anxious? Happy to have my support?

I doubted both of those things, but I kept that to myself as we entered the Oceano Mania room, where a crowd gathered around the thirteen-foot

sperm whale replica in the center. Theo stood on a podium in front of it, already deep into his introduction of the new exhibit.

Amaya tried to lead me closer to the podium, but I shook my head, keeping close to the door so I wouldn't be noticed and make a scene.

"On behalf of my family and the incredible Oceanographic team, I'm thrilled to introduce the new Mediterranean 2050 exhibit, an immersive and interactive experience you'll have to see to believe." Theo paused as the room applauded, and I was struck by how different the man the world saw was to the one I knew in private.

Up on the podium, Theo was every bit the polished royal, eloquent and prepared, but still daring to give a cheeky smile every now and then to his many admirers.

If only they knew what a bad boy lurked behind that handsome façade. On second thought, that might actually make him more popular.

"This exhibit has been years in the making, and I know Jean is devastated not to be here with you all today." He winked, then continued, "Well, maybe not *too* devastated, since he's on his honeymoon. But his loss is my gain, and I welcome you to a look at the Mediterranean's history, and what we can look forward to in the future. Thank you all for being here, and for your continued support of the Oceanographic Museum."

I clapped as Theo waved and nodded, giving a more personal thank you to those in the room, but just as he was about to walk offstage, we locked eyes and he stopped in his tracks. Then a smirk tipped one side of his mouth, and I inwardly groaned.

I should've known he would take my being here the wrong way, and the look he just gave me proved it.

As everyone began to file into the next room in the exhibit, Theo sauntered in my direction, his entire demeanor changing from respectable to smug as he got closer.

"If it isn't Shepard Winchester making a surprise appearance at my little event," he said, hands casually in his pockets as he cocked his head at me.

"Little?" I scoffed, lifting my gaze to take in the sheer size of the room.

He ignored that, narrowing his sharp blue eyes at me. "What are you doing here? I thought you had Libertine business."

"I do."

Theo's mouth snapped shut and then he slowly nodded. "I see. And here I thought you just couldn't bear to be away from me. How disappointing."

I let out a low curse and glanced around us, praying no one was within earshot.

“Relax. I may be crazy, but it’s not like I want to be America’s next first lady.”

“I swear to God…” Pinching the bridge of my nose, I sighed and made an attempt to hold my tongue. “With everything going on, I thought it best if you weren’t left…unattended.”

“*You* thought it best?”

“Yes.”

“Really.”

For fuck’s sake. “Fine, it was a mutual decision.”

“So King thought I needed a babysitter and you volunteered.”

“Would you rather have Lachlan? That’s who he planned to send in my place.”

Theo snorted. “Oh wow. He really is desperate. Lachlan would’ve stood out like a sore thumb.”

“Hence why you’re stuck with me.”

Theo moved as if to pass me by, then stopped, our shoulders touching as he glanced in my direction. “Not such a bad predicament to be in, I suppose.”

“You really need to stop doing that.”

“What?”

“Flirting with me. People are going to notice.”

Theo smirked, his eyes shifting around the room to the TV cameras broadcasting the event. “Oh please—the champagne is flowing, the festivities are underway. Why would anyone be paying attention to me?”

“Because you’re their prince, their guest of honor—”

“And devilishly handsome?”

Ignoring him, I continued, “I’m going to go and talk to—”

“Someone much less *stimulating* than me?”

“Something like that. Behave yourself.”

I didn’t bother waiting to hear whatever smartass response he made, because I knew if I spent too long with him I would lose any control I currently possessed.

That had never been a problem in the past with Theo—or anyone, for that matter—but something about the rebellious prince was getting to me. Maybe it was his give-no-fucks attitude that was drawing me in, the fact he

did what he wanted, when he wanted, the public be damned. There was a reason he was Monaco's favorite prince—he didn't bear the same responsibilities as his father or brother, so Theo was able to be his authentic self, which had endeared him to his countryfolk and always driven King absolutely insane.

That alone was enough to make Theo sexy—now.

And the more time I spent watching him…

"Shepard, I didn't know you were going to be making an appearance today."

I turned just in time to see Prince Louis, the current Prince of Monaco, with his wife, Jacqueline.

"I wasn't planning to. But when I heard Theo was hosting today's exhibition, I couldn't help myself."

Jacqueline leaned forward and patted my arm. "Well, I'm grateful you did. It gives me a chance to thank you."

I knew what she was referring to in an instant, and then her eyes drifted over my shoulder to where Theo stood smiling and making pleasantries with one of their donors.

"Theo is always on his best behavior when you're around." A soft smile tilted her lips as she brought her eyes back to mine. "Thank you for getting him to the altar on time."

I coughed a little at her word choice, the idea of getting Theo anywhere near an altar making breathing a little more difficult. And I wasn't even going to think about *how* I got him to behave that day.

"It was no trouble, really."

"I appreciate it anyway. It was one less thing for me to worry about that day."

And wasn't *that* the story of my life? People asking me to step in and make problems disappear from their life. Just so happened the "problem" had been Theo both times of late.

"The wedding was beautiful," I said, and snagged a champagne flute from a passing waitress. "I'm glad it all went off without a hitch."

"As are we," Prince Louis said as he surveyed the enormous room. "Lucien wasn't able to make today's event?"

"Unfortunately not. He and Kai had to return home for business."

"Oh, that's too bad, but I'm pleased you were able to stay." Jacqueline gave me a sly smile, her eyes twinkling. "And tell me, did you bring anyone

with you today?”

I was about to answer when I felt a hand clap me on the back. “Yeah, Shep. The public wants to know. Did you come alone?”

It took everything I had not to react to Theo’s double entendre as he stepped up beside me, and thank God I didn’t, because the smile on both his parents’ faces told me they had completely missed it.

I turned to see him smugly grinning. “I did, yes.”

“That’s a shame,” Jacqueline said. “A handsome man like you should have a lovely young man on his arm.”

“What about me?” Theo spoke up, waggling his brows at his mother. “I’m single.”

I sputtered on my sip of champagne, about to kill him for suggesting something so blatant, but his mother laughed and rolled her eyes.

“If I thought you would *choose* a lovely young man, I would suggest you go and find one too. But you have been quite adamant that you are not interested in settling down.”

It took all I had to keep a smile plastered on my lips, because Theo was about as subtle as a freight train. Even if his parents were oblivious.

“Hmm, you’re right. I’m too young and far too good looking to settle down anytime soon. I have at least another five or ten years ahead of me to sow my wild oats. Can’t say the same about this guy.” Theo winked at me, and I took back every single thought I had about him not being the most annoying pain in my ass *ever*. “He’s getting up there.”

“Theodore.” Jacqueline frowned at her son, then gave me a sweet smile. “Ignore him. Men age like fine wine, and you, Shepard Winchester, are a prime year.”

My cheeks warmed under her praise as her husband did exactly what I wanted to and politely excused himself from the conversation.

As they walked off to chat with their many friends and citizens, I slowly turned on a still-grinning Theo.

“I don’t know about you, but I am having *so* much fun.” He downed the last of his champagne and leaned in. “And just because you came *here* alone, doesn’t mean you have to when you get home…”

Jesus. He was going to give me a heart attack by the end of this trip. Not about to play his game a second longer, I decided my best course of action was to ignore him. Theo would always have a comeback, and I knew if I stayed another second I’d do something I would…*not* regret.

Instead, I turned on my heel and headed out of the museum to the familiar sound of Theo's laugh, hating the fact that I wanted him to come with me—naked.

Fuck.

OceanofPDF.com

14

THEO

"EXCELLENT JOB TODAY. You're a natural…when you want to be." Amaya side-eyed me and then went back to typing up a storm on her phone as we rode back to the palace later. Really, we could've made the quick walk, but after spending hours in her heels, Amaya had called for the royal car. That had ended up being a great decision, because once I slid into the back seat, I fought to keep my eyes open as a wave of exhaustion came over me.

"Nah, you're just kissing my ass because Jean's not here," I teased.

She let out an inelegant snort that was at odds with her buttoned-up persona. "I was giving you a compliment, Theo. Take it."

"Well, in that case, please continue. Start from the beginning and tell me all the things I did well in great detail."

"I'd rather throw you out of the car, *Your Serene Highness*."

I busted out a laugh and stretched my legs out in the back of the custom Lexus that had been a gift from the company when Jean and Katerina got engaged. The entire roof of the car was transparent, so we amassed plenty of waves from our fellow citizens as we passed by, which I reciprocated.

"There's been a couple of changes to the schedule, so I'll send you an updated itinerary shortly," Amaya said. "The Australian ambassador came down with the flu, so your meeting tomorrow has been canceled, along with the dinner." She finished typing and finally set her phone in her lap. "Looks like you've got a few days off now."

“Perfect. Looks like the chocolate arrangement I sent worked its magic.” When she arched a brow, I rolled my eyes. “I’m kidding. Send her my well wishes and a huge bouquet of…I don’t know, something nice.”

“Already done.”

“What would we do without you?”

“I ask myself that every day,” she murmured before her phone began to ring and she answered.

The car pulled up to the back entrance of the palace closest to where my wing was, but just as I stepped out, Amaya covered the speaker on her phone and whispered my name.

“Something you need, Amaya?” I leaned down and clocked the worried pull between her brows. “Xanax? Perhaps a joint?”

“No,” she snapped. “Promise me you’ll keep a low profile during your time off. Just…try not to do anything I wouldn’t do, *please*?”

I scoffed. “Are you implying I’m some sort of unhinged party animal? That’s a rude insinuation, considering I plan to pass out in the next two hours. Possibly in my own bed.”

“I mean it, Theo. You’re the face of the royal family while Jean’s gone, so please just…act like it.”

The poor woman was so tense that I thought she might crush the phone in her white-knuckled grasp, so I figured I’d give her a bit of relief.

“Tell you what—you promise to give your cell a break and I’ll try not to give you an aneurysm,” I said.

“Deal.”

I nodded and shut the door, knowing there was no way in hell she’d follow through. Someone would have to pry that thing from her cold, dead hands before she took a break.

But at least that meant I wasn’t beholden to my promise, either.

Not that I planned on doing anything. I didn’t think. It wasn’t like I woke up and decided to do something scandalous—it just happened.

“Good evening, Your Serene Highness.” The security guard opened the door, bowing his head as I walked inside.

“I told you there’s no need for all that when it’s just me.”

He nodded at the camera up in the corner, and I sighed.

“Fine. Next time I expect a full bow, then. Really overdo it.”

“Yes, Your Serene—”

“Oh, fuck off with that,” I said before waving him off with even more curses, and heard him chuckle in my wake.

My wing of the palace consisted of several rooms, large enough to fit a family should I decide to have one in the future. But for now it was silent, so quiet I could hear the grandfather clock down the hall.

I flipped on the TV in the sitting room and left the episode of *Peaky Blinders* playing for some background noise while I unknotted my tie. That choking device was always the first thing to come off, and I draped the silk over the doorknob leading to my bedroom as I entered—

And came to a sudden stop.

Everything in my room was pristine—which wasn’t the way I’d left it, but was always what I came back to thanks to our amazing cleaning staff—but it was the small black box on my bed with a red bow that caught my attention.

It wasn’t that unusual for me to receive gifts—the citizens of Monaco were generous and so were my many fans around the world. Parcels went through vigorous scans and checkpoints before they made it into the castle, but this one had a little extra finesse to it. Someone had put some effort in.

Ooh, maybe it was from Shep. A thank you for being such a good fuck.

I grinned as I picked up the parcel. No note. This was feeling more and more like Shep. Expensive silk ribbon, textured, masculine box, it felt luxurious under my fingers—like Shep’s body.

I really should’ve tried harder to tempt him into coming home with me. But he’d been right—there were too many cameras and wandering eyes at the exhibit for me to really put my all into it. Because whenever Shepard Winchester was in a room, the cameras always found him.

Good-looking bastard.

I stroked the tail of the ribbon before taking hold and tugging it free. Then I picked up the box and took off the lid. Inside, nestled on a bed of black velvet, was a red flash drive, and the first thing that popped into my mind was Lucien’s club. Black door or red? I wondered which room Shep would pick. Maybe that was what this was, an invitation—a sexually explicit one—for when we got back to the States.

Liking that idea more than I probably should, considering who Shep’s ex was, I grabbed my laptop, wanting to see what was on the drive. Moments later I was sitting with my back to the headboard, my shoes on the floor, and the flash drive in hand.

“Okay, let’s see what you sent me, Mr. Winchester.” I inserted the drive, and a video loaded on the page, the screen black, waiting for me to hit play.

I snatched up my headphones, just in case it really *was* something R-rated, because I couldn’t imagine what else he’d send in such a seductive box.

Ready for anything, I pressed play—and when *I* appeared on the screen walking into a certain building in Istanbul that was no longer, I quickly reached out and hit the stop button as if my computer was about to explode. In fact, I shoved the laptop onto the mattress and jumped off the bed.

What the actual fuck?

Who? How? What was I looking at? But when it didn’t burst into a fiery ball of flames, I gingerly reached for it, turning the computer until the screen was facing me.

Then I hit play again.

There on the screen—just like in the first email that had been sent to all my brothers—was me. But instead of walking *out* of an exploding building like some kind of vigilante, I was walking in the front door. It had me from different angles too. Back, side, and, *putain*, the front.

There, staring back at me like some kind of dumbass, was my recognizable royal face.

Except it *wasn’t* me.

One: I would never blow up a building in the light of fucking day. Come on, where would the light show be? And two: I would never be dumb enough to enter the front door and look up at the fucking camera while I was committing a crime.

Bitch, please.

Who the hell was doing this? Because it was really starting to piss me off.

Oui, I’d been in Istanbul. But I hadn’t done any of this shit, and if the rest of my brothers got one of these packages, they’d definitely think—

“Motherfucker.”

I snatched out the flash drive and slipped it back into the box, shoved my feet into my shoes, and headed to the door.

I wasn’t about to sit around here and let King, Shep, and everyone else think the worst of me. Fuck that. I was sick and tired of always looking like the bad seed, the wild fucker who had no discipline.

So I had impulse issues. I generally tried not to let them run free in situations that might see me wind up dead. The fact some asshole knew enough about me that he'd zeroed in on the one thing that would make my brothers doubt me made my blood boil.

I'd never betray my Libertine brothers. They were family. But the fact they were all questioning me was infuriating, and I couldn't let this latest piece of fake video have them talking about the best way to discipline me.

I stormed out of my room and had a quick word to the guard outside. By the time I reached the side entrance, a car was waiting for me.

"*Bonsoir,* Your Serene Highness," my driver said, and I didn't even have it in me to tell him to call me by my name.

I slipped into the back seat. "Villa Monaco, *merci.*"

As he pulled out of the palace's grounds, I stared down at the box on the seat beside me like it might still self-destruct. Truth be told, I was kind of hoping it would. But that wouldn't help me if everyone else had received the same package.

I just needed to get to Shep and clear the air before King called him and demanded my head be shipped back to him in a box. Okay, so maybe he'd demand my entire self so he could rip my head off himself, but still, I needed to get to Shep and explain…

I rubbed a hand over my face, racking my brain on how I was going to possibly explain *this* away.

Shep already had his doubts about me. He'd said as much when he found out about my tracker, and I couldn't really blame him. Of course his mind had gone to the worst-case scenario. Why else would I take out my tracker?

It hadn't been something I wanted to talk about, not yet, anyway. But it seemed I was going to have to whether I wanted to or not, thanks to whoever this fucknut was.

When my driver pulled in through the gates that surrounded the Libertine mansion, I looked up at the lit home and felt my chest tighten. This was the last thing I thought I'd be doing tonight, especially with Shep. But what other choice did I have?

I climbed out of the car, and told my driver he could leave before I shut the door. I didn't really feel like going back to the palace tonight knowing whoever sent this to me had gotten it past security and into my bedroom.

As the car drove off, I steeled myself against the confrontation I was about to run into. But as I walked up to the front door and reached into my pocket for my keys, I realized I'd left them at the palace. I'd been in such a damn rush, I'd barely remembered to put my shoes on.

Great, now I was going to have to knock on my own home's front door. Shep was just going to love that. I'd thought I'd at least be able to sneak in and then announce myself. After several knocks, I heard the sound of footsteps and braced myself for the confrontation to come.

But all that immediately disappeared as the door was pulled open and Shep stood in front of me in nothing but a towel.

Suddenly the flash drive wasn't the only thing burning a hole in my pants. So was my cock at the sight of several droplets of water sliding down every rigid muscle of his body.

Fake video evidence be damned.

OceanofPDF.com

15

SHEP

"THEO? WHAT ARE you—"

I didn't get the chance to finish before he pushed me inside, slammed the door, and took my lips in a crushing kiss. The second his mouth was on mine, I forgot all about the unease I'd seen written on his face when I answered the door. That look had quickly turned heated, though, when his gaze traveled down my body.

He nipped at my lower lip, tugging so that my mouth parted and he could slide his tongue inside.

I had two choices here: I could push him away and demand he leave, or I could lean into it and enjoy the kiss currently blowing my mind.

Option two it was.

My back hit the wall, and I reached for his face, angling his head and holding him for a deeper taste. It should've been no surprise that Theo had a wicked mouth and knew just how to use it, but that talented tongue had wrenched an orgasm from me I was still thinking about the next day, so when he sucked mine into his mouth, I couldn't help my moan.

He reached for my towel, ripping it off my body, but when he tossed it to the floor, something else fell with a bang and I pulled away.

The black box at Theo's feet wouldn't normally have made me look twice, but the anxious look on his face when he'd arrived had me pushing him back so I could pick it up.

"What's this?"

“We can look at that later,” he said, moving back in to brush his mouth over mine.

But something niggled in the back of my mind, his deflection making me wonder what he was, yet again, trying to hide.

“Or we can look at it now.” I turned my head to the side, avoiding his kiss, and opened the box. The only thing inside was a single flash drive, and I frowned as I picked it up. “What’s this?”

Theo sighed and took a step back, but when his eyes lowered to my semi-erect cock, I grabbed my towel and tied it back around my waist. The man would take any distraction he could get and use it to his advantage, and right now I needed answers more than I needed his body.

And wasn’t that fucking unfortunate.

I held the drive up and arched a brow. “Theo? What’s on this?”

“Not you giving me a hot show, that’s for sure.”

“What?”

He ran his fingers through his hair and then shrugged. “The box was on my bed with a red bow. I figured it was your way of thanking me for a job well done.” When I only stared at him, he added, “For giving you the best blow job you’ve ever had, obviously.”

“For fuck’s sake—”

“And that too. You think I let just anyone pound my ass and get away with it?”

I started to respond, but that was exactly what he wanted. Anything to avoid talking about whatever was really on the drive.

I’d just have to see for myself.

My laptop was still in the living room where I’d left it, so I headed in that direction, Theo following on my heels.

“Shep, wait—”

“Why did you really come here tonight?” I threw back over my shoulder. “And why didn’t you use your key?”

“I forgot it.”

“Because you rushed over here so fast?”

When he didn’t immediately respond, I shook my head and inserted the drive into the laptop.

“Sure you don’t want to tell me what I’m about to find?”

“Why bother? You’re not going to believe me after you see that anyway.” Theo moved in behind the seat I’d taken, and as I went to hit play,

I felt a hand on my shoulder.

I glanced back to see a grimace pulled tight across his usually smug lips.

“I don’t know who’s sending this shit, but they’re really good.”

Which told me whatever I was about to see was similar to the first message we’d received. “Okay, well, let me check it out.”

Theo gave a clipped nod, and my pulse started to thump as I hit play. An image of the building from the first video appeared pre-explosion, but this angle was new.

“What am I looking—”

“Wait for it.”

Not a second later, Theo could be seen crossing the street and heading toward the doors. He pulled it open and headed inside, then the video switched to another angle of the same moment, this one capturing an up-close snapshot of Theo’s face.

“Fuck,” I said.

“Mhmm.”

“That’s definitely you.”

“Except it’s not.” When I raised a brow at him, he said, “What? It’s not.”

“That’s”—I shook my head and looked back at the screen—“really hard to believe.”

“I know, but it’s the truth. Do you really think I would go in the front door and look *at* the camera before going inside and blowing the thing to smithereens? Come on, Shep. I’m smarter than that, and you know it.”

He was, and I did. But that still didn’t explain what I was looking at. The image on the screen where I’d paused it was unmistakably the Prince of Monaco entering a building that was recently blown to high heaven.

If this video got out, accompanied by the first, Theo and his family would be fucked. There were no two ways about it. King was going to have a fit.

“Look, it’s not me, so who cares?” Theo said, and reached around me to pull the drive from my computer. “I’m not worried.”

“Really? Then why are you here?”

He sighed and took a seat on the other side of the living room. “I don’t know. Jesus.”

“I think you do.” I put the laptop on the coffee table and leaned back into my seat, and didn’t miss the way Theo’s eyes caught on my naked chest. But I wouldn’t let him change the topic. “I think there’s more going on here than what you’re telling me. Sure, this might not be you, but you know *something*. You already told me you were in Istanbul, but you’re also telling me these videos are fake.”

“Those two things *can* be true, you know.”

“I know.” I ran a frustrated hand through my damp hair. “But I can’t help you if you don’t start trusting me. You’re holding something back, and I want to know what it is.”

Theo’s eyes narrowed. “You think I made that building explode.”

“I don’t know what to think, but you sure as shit aren’t giving me much to go on. So if you want to keep King off your ass, and save your own, you might want to start talking.”

Theo shot to his feet and started to pace the length of the room, and it took everything I had not to push further. But I knew if I did, it would just push him away, and that was the last thing I wanted.

I had no idea what had happened in Istanbul, or who was behind these videos, but I suddenly found myself wanting Theo to trust me enough to open up and tell me how he’d ended up in this fucked-up situation.

“I went to Istanbul at the request of a former acquaintance…”

That was a start, but he was still being evasive, and that just wouldn’t do. Not when someone was threatening to ruin his reputation on a global scale and possibly expose his Libertine connection.

“What kind of acquaintance? An ex?”

Theo stopped pacing and looked over his shoulder at me. “Would you be jealous?”

“Would you focus?”

He licked his lips and ran his gaze down over me. “Sure you want me to do that?”

“I meant on our conversation.”

“Shame… But no, not an ex. A former royal guard here at the palace.”

That was interesting. So whatever was going on had something personally to do with Theo, not Libertine.

“Former?” I pressed. “I thought that position was basically lifelong once given.”

“It can be, but he left due to family matters. Or at least, that’s the reason he gave. We figured that meant a sick parent he needed to take care of, and he was released from his position immediately.”

I crossed my arms and didn’t miss the way Theo’s attention fell to my chest. Even discussing something important wasn’t enough of a distraction, it seemed.

“Why would a former guard asking you to come to Istanbul be a reason to take out your tracker and keep secrets? What are you hiding?”

Theo began to pace again, and as the silence between us dragged on, I felt my impatience rise. I sat up, about to snap at him to get on with it, but then he turned around, looked me in the eye, and said, “The former guard is Conrad Black.”

All the blood drained from my face, and I shoved my chair back, getting to my feet as Theo held his hands up.

“Let me explain—”

“Conrad Black is a traitor and informant with blood on his hands. Why the *fuck* would you have anything to do with him?”

“See, this reaction is exactly why I didn’t tell you. *Any* of you.”

“Have you lost your mind? You willingly got yourself mixed up with this…this…terrorist—”

“He’s not a terrorist,” Theo said, standing his ground as I stalked toward him.

“He disclosed highly classified information that cost people their lives, Theo. That’s not someone any of us should have anything to do with, especially you.”

He opened and shut his mouth before finally nodding and dropping his hands. “You’re right. It’s fucked up what happened, and there’s no excuse for it. But he needed help, and I owed him one—”

“You owe him shit.”

“He saved my life, Shep.”

I stopped in my tracks but then narrowed my eyes. “That’s what guards do.”

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “He wasn’t on duty. I was young and stupid and messing with people I shouldn’t have been. Not sure if you’ve noticed, but sometimes my mouth gets me in trouble.”

“Oh, I’ve noticed.”

There was a hint of a grin on his face, just that tiny spark of devilishness, but just as quickly it was gone. “Look, Conrad stepped in when I got outnumbered by a bunch of pissed-off guys with more than their fists for weapons, and if it hadn’t been for him, you sure as hell wouldn’t be seeing this handsome face right now. He saved my ass and he kept it quiet. He didn’t have to do that.”

“Why haven’t I heard about this?”

“Because no one knew. Not my family, not King. Conrad never said anything, and I sure as hell wasn’t volunteering that info.”

“So, what, he’s been holding this over your head to use when he needed you?”

“It’s not like that. He asked for my help, I made a choice, and it was the right one.”

I scoffed and gestured back at the laptop. “Really? A bit of blackmail’s not a big deal for you compared to whatever you’re really doing now?”

“Hey, fuck you,” Theo snapped, shoving my chest so that I fell back a step. “I just told you what you wanted to know. No one said you had to agree with it.”

“You’re right about that. I don’t agree with it. You should’ve come to us if you needed help.”

He let out a contemptuous laugh and dropped into a nearby seat, throwing his feet up on the table. “Right, great idea. Let all of you in on it so I can have six people attacking me for doing what was right.”

“And what exactly was that? Post explosives in a building to destroy evidence of something your old buddy did?”

“Fuck. You.”

“You should be so lucky.” I refastened the towel at my waist and leaned back against the table, looking down at Theo’s flushed face, his tight expression. He was heated about this, there was no mistaking that reaction, and I tried to calm down enough that I could listen without wanting to strangle him.

“Okay,” I said before sucking in a deep breath and letting it out slowly. “What did he need your help with? Why were you there, and what *exactly* did you do?”

The fact that I was willing to keep listening seemed to surprise him, which made me feel like an ass even with how pissed I was. I needed to know the details and the whys before I made any more snap judgments.

This was Theo, not some fucking delinquent. We'd had to trust each other with our lives many times over, so I forced my judgment to the back of my mind for now.

No promises it wouldn't come roaring back, though.

Theo drummed his fingers along the table and met my stare dead-on. "Conrad's brother was kidnapped a few weeks ago. The reasons why don't matter, and I didn't ask. He was being held in the basement of that building you saw, which is actually the old consulate—or was, I guess. He contacted me for any connections I might have, but obviously I know how to get in and out undetected. Keyword being *undetected*, which is how I know that bullshit video isn't me."

"Because his brother would've been with you on the way out."

"Bingo."

There was no need to ask if Theo's mission had been successful. The fact that he was sitting here right now told me that, since he'd never stop until he got exactly what he wanted.

Still…

"You didn't think it'd be smart to have backup?" I said.

"If I thought any one of you would understand and approve, I would've asked."

I reared back like he'd slapped me, but damn. That stung. There was no one I was closer to on this earth than my Libertine brothers, and that shit was supposed to be no-matter-what loyalty.

"Theo—"

"No," he said, shaking his head. "Don't worry about it. I made the call to do it the way it went down, and now we're even."

"He said that?"

"Didn't have to. A life for a life."

God, I hoped he was right about that, because no way in hell did we need to get mixed up with Conrad Black. We were stretched to the limit as it was.

"Don't look so worried," Theo said, interrupting my thoughts before they could start to spiral. "He doesn't know a thing about us. Or about me, other than the face I show. He doesn't even know it was me that did the dirty work myself."

And that was exactly why there was no way Theo had been the one who hit the trigger on that building. We never showed our faces during a

mission, especially the two of us. It was too risky, but more than that, it would be really fucking stupid.

Theo may be reckless, but he wasn't stupid. And I truly didn't believe he'd put us at risk. Himself? Yes. That much was obvious due to the lingering issue of his removing his tracker. I didn't even want to think about what would've happened if the mission had gone sideways and we couldn't figure out where he was to get to him.

That alone made me want to strangle him all over again. Or lock him in the closet for a repeat of some oral hate sex—I couldn't decide which.

"If what you're saying is true, then there's a glaring problem," I said.

"I know." Theo was already nodding.

"Who the hell sent this video? Who blew up the building? And how the fuck did the video ring true for Alessio?" There was nothing our resident tech genius couldn't do, couldn't hack, couldn't decipher. He'd run the diagnostics. The video wasn't fake.

Only it had to be for Theo to be telling the truth.

"He's not all-powerful," Theo said. "I know he thinks he is, but something's slipped through the cracks."

The implications of that were too much to think about. Someone getting one over on Alessio? It seemed impossible.

And yet…

"Fuck." I leaned my head back and stared up at the ceiling. "He's not gonna take that well."

"Not even a little bit."

"And don't think you're off the hook with your goddamn tracker."

"Noted." Theo dropped his feet to the floor and stood, moving over until his thighs pressed up against my knees. Just that move—or maybe it was all the adrenaline and pent-up frustration—had my cock taking notice behind my towel.

"Have I fully satisfied the question-and-answer portion of this program?" He walked his fingers up my thigh and over to the semi creeping up beneath his touch. "Can we move on to a more…enjoyable way to end the night? I'll make up for my wicked ways."

The way he could flip a switch in conversation and demeanor made my head spin, and I had to halt his hand before my brain cells made an exit.

"On one condition," I said, and like he knew what I was going to say, he groaned.

“Shep—”

“It’s non-negotiable.”

“You’re an ass.”

“And you’re nothing but trouble.”

Theo’s eyes narrowed, but I’d already won this battle, because he eventually relented.

“Fine,” he said. “I’ll go. But *tomorrow.*”

We were off to see the King.

OceanofPDF.com

16

SHEP

THE TRIP BACK to New York was a turbulent one, to say the least. Not because of any weather systems we had to navigate, but rather the volatile man sitting opposite me in the jet.

Last night had been…informative. Theo had finally opened up to me about what had actually taken place in Istanbul, and now that I knew the facts, I was more determined than ever to get to the bottom of who was behind this.

Someone was fucking with him, and that didn't sit well with me. Neither did the fact they were obviously trying to cause a rift within Libertine by pitting us against one of our own.

The other thing bothering me? This asshole—whoever it was—was good. They'd not only managed to bypass Alessio's security systems, but also the Palace of Monaco's walls to deliver two incriminating pieces of information.

They were cunning and determined, hellbent on ruining Theo—and that made them our number one enemy.

All I needed to do now was get King on board, and the best way to do that was have Theo talk to him. Something Theo clearly wasn't looking forward to, judging by the solemn expression that had been plastered across his face the entire trip home. He'd also been uncharacteristically quiet, which never meant anything good when it came to Theo.

But I could understand his reluctance. King wasn't the easiest person to talk to. He had a brusque way about him, a control that made him seem

unbending in his resolve—but he wasn't unreasonable, and once he found out what Theo had been up to and why, he'd be the first to get behind him.

At least, that was what I hoped.

The moment the wheels touched down on the tarmac and the jet came to a stop outside its designated hangar, Theo was unbuckling his belt and getting to his feet.

"In a rush?" I asked as he grabbed his carry-on from one of the compartments.

"I phoned for a car as we were landing, and it should be"—he bent to look out the window—"waiting for me."

I frowned and peered out the window to see a black Rolls-Royce with the Monaco flags on the back of the vehicle and let out a sigh.

"You had them send the royal car? That's not exactly subtle when heading to Libertine."

"Agreed. But I'm not going straight to Libertine." Theo went to walk by me, about to exit the plane, but I grabbed hold of his arm and got to my feet.

"What do you mean, you're not going to Libertine? We decided—"

"No, *you* decided. The time we'd fly out. The excuse I'd tell my family. When and what we'd tell King. But news flash, you aren't my handler *or* my scheduler, so I'm going to go home, shower, and relax before going one on one with the Almighty King."

"Theo that's not a good—"

"Idea?" He nodded, then looked down at where my hand rested on his arm. "Probably. But if I don't have a second to get my head on straight and unwind, I might accidentally blurt out something I shouldn't. Like how damn good it felt having your cock inside me."

I dropped my hand as though his arm was on fire, and Theo scoffed.

"Exactly. I need to be firing on all cylinders before I deal with King, because we both know if he lands a low blow I'll go lower, and I have some really, *really* good ammo up my sleeve this time around."

I squeezed my eyes shut and scrubbed a hand over my face. The last thing Theo should do was taunt King with our recent involvement. Not because I thought he'd care, but because in all likelihood he wouldn't, and then it would just be one more reason King would be pissed at Theo—and me.

What a colossal mess that would be, and what would be the point? It wasn't like this thing we'd fallen into in Monaco was going to continue. So then we'd just be in the doghouse because of a moment that was now over? That was definitely something I'd rather avoid, and if Theo needed an hour or two to get his shit under control, then I wasn't about to pressure him.

"So what time should I tell him you'll be there?"

Theo stopped by the door but didn't bother looking back as he said, in true Theo fashion, "Whenever I fucking get there."

"I WAS WONDERING what time your plane was getting in."

King's familiar voice had me drawing to a halt as I made my way through the carved stone halls of the private underground rooms of Libertine.

Our exclusive, members-only club—a nondescript black building—took up a full block in New York, and to the outside world looked abandoned. But if you were lucky enough to be granted entry, one soon found out there was a whole different world on the other side of the bolted doors. One full of luxury, decadence, and excess. One that was only available to a select few.

This underground section of the club was even more exclusive. Only seven people had access, and as I came to a stop and turned to face the leader of our elite group, I braced myself for what I knew was going to be a less-than-pleasant exchange.

"You didn't ask Alessio for our flight details?"

"No." King slipped his hands into his pockets as he walked toward me, his eyes shifting past my shoulder as though looking for Theo. "But I did expect there to be two of you when you finally arrived. What happened? Did you push Theo out of the plane mid-flight?"

Usually I'd laugh that off and agree that would be the best way to shut Theo up. But something about the comment had my hackles rising.

"That'd make it a little difficult for you to grill him, wouldn't it?"

King arched a brow, clearly not missing my defensive tone. He never missed anything. I guess Theo had been smart to take a couple of hours. Maybe I should've too.

"I suppose it would. Which raises the question, where is he?"

"Home, is what he told me." I stepped around King and headed toward the large meeting room in the catacombs. "But if you want to double-check,

you could always pull up his tracker."

"That won't be necessary," King said, his voice following me into the room. "But I'd hoped to see him as soon as he arrived—"

"Yeah, he gets that," I snapped, turning on him. "But he wants a minute to change and…stuff."

"Stuff?" King frowned. "Well, I wish he would've done that here. A new message has come to light, and we need to—"

"A new message?" I said, wondering if the video that had been hand-delivered to Theo had now been emailed to the rest of the Kings. I hadn't seen anything in my inbox before boarding the plane, but I hadn't checked since landing.

I pulled out my phone and went to open my email, but King shook his head.

"It wasn't an email."

Oh fuck. Did everyone receive a box, then? A flash drive?

"This was a handwritten message. Delivered to me, personally. It was waiting on my desk when I came in this morning."

What the hell? Now this fucker had been *inside* Libertine?

"I don't understand. How? What did it say?"

"I can only answer as to what it said. The *how* is still a mystery. It arrived with the rest of my mail, and Alessio has gone back through all the security footage and found nothing suspicious."

This person *was* good. Too fucking good.

"What did the message say?"

King reached inside his jacket and pulled out a black envelope. "Read it for yourself."

I opened it up and pulled out a narrow piece of paper inside.

You have a snake in your midst. Cut off its head...or I will.

Mother. Fucker.

"I'm assuming this is referring to Theo."

King took the message back and looked over it again, but all I could think about was how it was a direct fucking threat to Theo's life.

“Shep?”

“What?”

“I’m assuming this is about whatever is going on with Theo. What have you learned since the first email? Has he told you anything?”

He told me everything.

I wasn’t about to tell King that. It wasn’t my place. But if Theo didn’t get his ass over here, and soon, King was going to start drawing his own conclusions about all this.

“I think it would be better if he talked to you. Secondhand intel is never as reliable—”

“Yours is. I’d never doubt you.” King’s voice softened around the edges as he studied me, and I found myself looking away. He had a very good eye for bullshit, and the last thing I wanted was to be under his microscope when discussing Theo.

There were too many secrets there. Ones that I now found myself entangled in.

“You need to hear Theo’s explanation from Theo. It’s the only way you’re going to ever be able to trust him again.”

“So you *do* know what happened.”

“I did my job. I went to Monaco, I made sure Theo behaved at the wedding”—*not that I’ll ever tell you how*—“and I found out the information you wanted and brought him back to talk to you. Anything else, you need to work out with him.”

King tapped the envelope on his hand as if thinking that over, and then pulled his seat out at the table.

“Very well, then I believe our meeting is over.”

I gave a clipped nod and headed out of the room, ready to go up to the Libertine bar and have a drink. Then I all but ran into Alessio.

He grunted, “Fuckin’ hell,” and then shoved his long hair behind his ears. “You wanna maybe watch where you’re going?”

The surly tone was so out of character that it shocked me more than our run-in. I was always the serious one amongst my brothers, so to see him so wound up was unusual. But then again, if King was riding him half as hard as he’d been riding me about Theo, I could understand the tension.

The cybersecurity of our members fell under Alessio’s purview. So the fact that some fuckwad had infiltrated his systems must’ve had his panties in a bunch.

“Seems to me you’re the one who’s distracted.” I pointed to the small tablet in his hand. “What are you working on?”

“What do you think?”

“Judging by your fantastic attitude right this very moment, Theo’s latest…issue.”

Alessio snorted. “Is that what he’s calling it? An issue? ’Cause from where I’m sitting, it’s a catastrophic fucking problem. One I’m somehow left to figure out—”

“I’m sure you will.”

“I’m glad you are, because I’m not. Whoever this is, they’re good, Shep. As good as, if not *better*, than me. And that’s not fucking cool.”

I could see how that would stick in his craw. “They’re not better than you, they’re just playing a different game. Once you work it out, you’ll crush them. You always do.”

“Tell King that.”

I chuckled and glanced over my shoulder to where I’d left our boss. “I’m going to pass on that. He’s waiting on Theo, and you know how he feels about waiting.”

Alessio nodded, but as I went to step around him and make my way upstairs, he grabbed hold of my arm. “About Theo…”

“Yeah?”

“You know I track the monitors, right?”

“Right.” What was he getting at? Had he somehow worked out that Theo had removed his tracker before going to Istanbul? It’d taken me a minute, but how would Alessio know unless he’d seen Theo’s arm?

“Well, I just thought you should know that it showed a certain prince wasn’t in his palace last night—”

Oh fuck.

“—and instead showed him in very close proximity to you.”

My mind began to race as I thought back to the hot encounter we’d shared last night. “So? You know he sometimes stays at Villa Monaco.”

“Uh huh, but it’s a rare day that *your* tracker is in *his* residence at the palace, like it was the day before.” Alessio raised a brow. “Anything I should know there?”

Other than I’m a fucking idiot who once again forgot all about our damn trackers? No wonder Theo had removed his.

“Nope.”

“Because King is already pissed at Theo, at everyone, really. Wouldn’t want to give him another reason to be.”

“Then shut up and mind your own business,” I snapped, and Alessio’s eyes flared. It seemed my surliness had come back full force.

“No problem,” he said, and turned to walk away from me. “But don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Yeah, I thought as I headed toward the stairs that would take me up to the main floor of Libertine, *doesn’t really matter.*

I’d been warning myself from the moment I touched Theo in the church that it was a bad idea. Pity I hadn’t fucking listened.

OceanofPDF.com

17

THEO

I'D MADE MY way to Libertine…eventually. Shep may have been in a rush to see King, but I wasn't.

I also wasn't acknowledging how *that* annoyed the shit out of me. King was a badass, of course he was, or none of us would've been keen to join him in the first place. But outside of business? Shep could do better.

Maybe I just never understood the appeal there, because they were both too serious for their own good. Shep needed someone who could relieve all that tension in his tight body with a night of never-ending orgasms. Or make him crack a smile every now and then.

Something the man across from me had never managed to make Shep do, of that I was positive.

King stared at me silently where he sat at the carved-from-boulder round table in our underground throne room. He didn't move. Didn't speak. Just continued to absorb everything I told him with a stillness that was unnerving.

I was used to it and didn't so much as fidget under that look anymore.

I did, however, allow myself the lit kretek between my fingers, and I brought it to my mouth, taking a deep inhale. The soft crackling it made was the only sound in the room, and I waited for the reprimand that was coming.

As I blew the smoke out to the side, King gestured for the cigarette, or so I thought, because when I went to hand it to him, he took hold of my wrist instead. His grip was unyielding, his large fingers wrapping

completely around me, and though my first instinct was to pull away, I didn't fight it.

With his thumb, he pushed my watch up and then rubbed over the small scar that taking the tracker out—and then putting it back in—had caused. Eventually it would probably fade to nothing, but it was still too new not to notice. Hence the cuff I wore.

"The bones of our organization, of our brotherhood, have been built on trust. I chose you, each of you, because I believe in you. I know what you have to offer; I know where your loyalty lies. We've made promises to each other that go deeper than any blood tie." King continued to stare at the scar and brush his finger over it, uncaring of the ashes falling from my kretek to the table. "With that loyalty comes protection, not just for you and your position in the world, but for everyone."

Abruptly, he let go of my arm and sat back, bringing his dark gaze to mine.

"I understand your choice to help someone and even the score. I can't fault you for wanting to do something you felt was right. That's who you are and why're you're an integral, irreplaceable part of us."

There was a "but" coming soon, I could feel it, and I steeled myself by nodding in agreement as I took a drag of my kretek.

"But—"

There it was.

"—we all took an oath to each other, and your decision to go on a covert op on your own, deliberately removing your tracker and putting yourself in harm's way, was really fucking irresponsible, Theo. Not to mention dangerous and incredibly selfish. You gave no thought to possible repercussions, to how the rest of us would feel—"

"In my defense, I wasn't planning on ever telling you."

"And that's a problem," he said, leaning forward, his eyes narrowing to slits. "Have you done this before? Will you do it again? How do we trust you are where you say you are?"

"I haven't. I won't. I just couldn't take the chance you'd interfere, and it was best not to involve you."

"Because you knew we wouldn't approve. What else are you doing that I wouldn't approve of?"

Your ex...

Thank fuck for my poker face, because it was best not to give him *those* details. Did I have it in my pocket for whenever I needed it? Sure. But I wasn't messing around with Shep to have ammo.

No, he was purely a fun pursuit, just not one King needed to know about, though I could just picture the look on his face if he found out his ex enjoyed putting his cock in my ass.

So no, we wouldn't go there.

"You're right," I told him, tapping the kretek in the crystal ashtray. "I fucked up. I should've kept the tracker in, made my move, and apologized later."

"Oh yes, because that would've been *so* much better." King sighed and rubbed a hand over the stubble lining his granitelike jaw. "I'll put up with a lot, Theo, you know that, and I give a lot of leeway, but this? This doesn't just impact you. Why can't you understand that?"

"I do understand that. I just don't think it's that big a deal. It wasn't me. Everything on that video is fake."

"Except the explosion and the fact you were in Istanbul."

"But not where they said I was."

"I'm not going to rehash this again."

Thank God. If I had to explain this again, I might go to the top floor of Libertine and throw myself off.

"You've said your piece and I've said mine. What I expect now is for you to tell me you will never, under any circumstance, do this again."

"So you want me to lie?"

"Goddamn it, Theo," King boomed, and it wasn't hard to work out that *wasn't* what he wanted.

"I'm just trying to be honest. I'm not really known for thinking over my actions—"

"Which in this instance has led to someone threatening your life."

"Wait, what do you mean?"

King slid an envelope across the desk, and I put the cigarette in the ashtray and reached for it.

You have a snake in your midst. Cut off its head...or I will.

“The fuck does that mean?” I shot to my feet and shook the letter at King. “Snake? They’re implying I’m a fucking *traitor*?”

“They’re definitely not being subtle about it, and, well, you haven’t exactly been forthcoming, have you?”

I cursed in French and spun away from him. This was getting out of hand. I had no clue who was doing this or why. But one thing was for certain—they’d better hope they cut my head off first, otherwise they were going to wish they were fucking dead.

“But beyond that,” King continued, bringing my attention back to him, “I’m most concerned with the second part of the note. The threat.”

I scoffed. “I dare them to come for me.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of.”

“I’m not.” I narrowed my eyes, my blood suddenly humming with the prospect of a fight. “I’d relish the face-to-face.”

“That’s exactly what I want to talk to you about. I think the smartest thing for you to do right now is go underground.”

“*Excuse-moi?* I’m sorry, but it just sounded like you said you want me to run and hide.”

“Not hide, per se, but keep a low profile.”

“A.k.a. hide.” I rested my hands on top of one of the high-back chairs and glared at my boss. “I’m not going to do that. I *can’t* do that. I have family obligations.”

King drummed his fingers on the tabletop, and I could see his mind working behind those dark eyes. If he thought I was going to run from a threat, he had another thing coming. I didn’t run, and I certainly never hid from a fight.

I was about to put up another protest when he held a finger up and picked up his phone. Seconds later, Shep stepped inside the meeting room, and if I thought the tension had been running high before, it now positively crackled in the air.

Put together as ever in his three-piece suit, Shep’s eyes immediately found King before shifting to me.

“Why are you here?” I bit out, my spine stiffening under his penetrating stare.

Great. Gone was sexy Monaco Shep, and in his place was stick-up-his-ass Shep.

“I asked him to come,” King said, and it was right there on the tip of my tongue to tell him I had too, just this past week.

“Why? The threat is against me, not him.”

“Which I understand. But you also mentioned you can’t disappear due to family obligations.”

“So?” Where the hell was he going with this? It wasn’t like Shep could go in my place.

“You can go,” King said as though I needed his permission. “Attend your family obligations. But from here on out, consider Shep your shadow.”

You have got *to be shitting me.*

“Wherever you go, he will be.” King turned his attention on a mortified Shep.

Good, at least I wasn’t the only horrified one in the room.

“And you? I better not see your face on any TVs or magazines,” he told Shep. “You are a ghost this go around. But you are to watch him. You hear me?”

Shep looked at me, apprehension written all over his face at the thought of watching me, because of course he would. Just not the way King would like. “I don’t think that’s a good idea,” he said.

King arched a brow. “No? Do you have something else better to do than make sure your brother’s safe?”

I could see Shep balk at the word the same way I did, but he only shook his head.

“Good.” King started to turn away, but then hesitated and put his hand on Shep’s shoulder. “I know I can depend on you.”

Shep gave a clipped nod. “Of course.”

“We’ll figure this out,” King said, and as he backed out of the room, looked directly at me and added, “I don’t give third chances, Theo. Make this one count.”

OceanofPDF.com

18

SHEP

KING HAD NO idea the chaos he was inviting by making me Theo's de facto babysitter. There wasn't much I could do to get out of it, either, not without spilling a certain secret.

That would never happen.

Tonight's royal duties hadn't been on the official schedule, but when Amaya found out Theo happened to be in New York at the same time as the new *F1* movie premiere, she made sure he'd make an appearance. Many of the film's scenes had been shot in Monaco, home of the famed Grand Prix, so having a royal in attendance alongside the director and stars was fantastic press.

As for me, it wouldn't be out of the ordinary to be invited to a premiere, but King's instructions had been absolute. I was to stay in the shadows. To be *Theo's* shadow. And even though I was one of the most recognizable men in Manhattan, I knew how to stay under the radar. Being one of Libertine's leaders meant years figuring out how to navigate through the world without being seen when you didn't want to be.

Theo's surprise arrival on the red carpet sent the press into a frenzy, snapping photo after photo, calling out his name and yelling myriad questions. The flashes were blinding, but Theo seemed to revel in it, that charming smile just the right side of sinful. His reputation as one of the sexiest men in the world was well earned from the way he played to the cameras and gave his attention so intently to each person who wanted it.

Hell, I knew that from experience, having been on the other side of that attention.

It was strange to notice Theo like that now after all these years of being so platonically close, but it really was undeniable how attractive he was. It wasn't exactly gonna be a hardship to watch him—I just needed to not think about him naked.

From where I stood, just part of the crowd, I tipped my hat lower over my forehead, and somehow that caught Theo's attention. We locked eyes, and a playful smirk curled his lips. That look spelled trouble, the last thing we needed right now, but thankfully his gaze didn't linger long on me before another reporter garnered his focus.

As he continued down the red carpet, I watched him, watched the crowd, watched for anyone who looked like they had ill intentions. No one would be getting their hands on Theo, but I had to make sure I was able to stay close enough, just in case.

Not that Theo couldn't take care of himself, but the world didn't need to know how good he was at taking a man down with his bare hands…as well as the many other tools he used for "fun."

As Theo and the cast and crew made their way inside the new Galaway Theater, I did the same, producing a press badge so I could keep close to the man I was assigned to. My phone vibrated in my pants pocket—a message from Theo.

THEO:

How's the view of my ass from back there?

I rolled my eyes and didn't bother responding—or looking at said ass. He was only a few feet ahead of me, but it was too dark in the narrow hall to make out what I knew was an exquisitely plump ass, unfortunately covered by a tailored suit.

Gaining ground on him, I could make out the film's director saying, "When we enter, give a wave to everyone in the crowd before taking your seats in the assigned private balconies. After the movie, we'll all gather onstage in front of the screen for a short Q&A."

Amaya had already coordinated our seating arrangements, giving me the private balcony directly beside and behind Theo's, where I could be

close but not obvious. I waited for him to enter his before I closed the curtain behind mine.

We had a full view of the packed crowd below, and Theo smiled and waved down at them before glancing over his shoulder at me. He unfastened the button of his jacket, shot me a wink, and then took his seat angled toward the screen.

THEO:
Still behind me… I think you definitely like the view.

Again I ignored his text, hoping he'd get the hint to pay attention and stop antagonizing me. But Theo, being Theo, wasn't going to let me off that easy.

THEO:
After the movie, want to go get something to eat? And by that I mean, want to come taste me?

He wasn't going to quit until I responded.

It's rude to text during a movie. Turn off your phone.

THEO:
But what if I need you?

When I didn't bother responding, he seemed to get a clue and put his phone away. That gave me a few minutes to scan the crowd as the movie was introduced. Theo's guards might've been posted directly outside his curtain, but inside I was his first line of defense, and I took my job seriously.

I took in all the moviegoers and zeroed in on a few here and there whose curiosity had them looking up toward the box seats. I made sure to melt back into the shadows, whereas Theo did his princely duties and waved to his adoring fans.

He was good at his job, a professional charmer. Little did they know that in his spare time this particular prince could use the necktie he'd

begrudgingly worn tonight as a noose if need be.

He was quite the paradox, the Prince of Monaco, and one I was growing increasingly aware of—despite my efforts not to.

I didn't want to notice how thick his hair was. How good it had felt twisted in my fingers when his mouth was wrapped around my cock. But as my eyes traveled back to him, that was all I could think about.

Thank God that was when the lights faded and the movie started. Otherwise I might've been tempted to take Theo up on his taunt and come on over and taste him.

I was so fucking screwed.

THE MOVIE WAS over before I knew it, an action-packed blockbuster that not only highlighted Monaco, but also showed off the sheer horsepower of the race cars that competed on the narrow streets that ran through it.

It showcased the beauty, elegance, and luxury of the place while feeding all the adrenaline junkies that came to see how it might feel to be the driver of one of those badass machines.

Something myself and my fellow Kings had experienced firsthand, courtesy of the man who was now standing and applauding the movie as though he himself had directed, produced, and paid for it.

It seemed Theo had enjoyed himself too, and luckily for us, everyone—including him—had behaved. Nothing out of the ordinary had taken place, no obvious threat directed toward him. Now all we had to do was get through the Q&A section of the evening.

"Theo?" Amaya said as she pulled back the curtain. "If you're ready, I'll take you downstairs for the follow-up."

Theo got to his feet, and I definitely had a good look at his ass in those fitted pants before he shrugged into his jacket and buttoned it.

As if he could feel my eyes on him, he glanced over his shoulder and said, "You coming?"

It was on the tip of my tongue to say, *Not yet*, but I wasn't going to feed into his delusions that we'd be picking up our physical relations now that we were back in New York. That was a recipe for disaster, but I knew he'd jump into it headfirst if I gave him any kind of encouragement.

So I merely nodded, got to my feet, and waited for him to exit before following at a distance.

The theatre was packed, so the fact that Theo was about to stand on a stage in front of a bunch of moviegoers made me nervous. I moved into the wings and made sure to pull my hat down low. Theo took to the stage, and the crowd went crazy.

Jesus. You'd think he was about to sing a fucking song or something, and truth be told, I'd totally pay to see that. But for now I'd have to settle for listening to him answer questions from the excited crowd.

What's your favorite part about living in Monaco? "I'm the prince?"

Have you ever driven a Formula 1 car? "Well, I own three, so it would be a shame if I hadn't."

Have you ever thought about being an actor? You're handsome enough. "*Merci. Oui*, I've thought about it. There's something extremely alluring about putting on a mask and becoming someone different. Maybe I should try that."

Like Batman? "*Oui*, just like Batman."

The crowd went wild at the idea. He glanced over at Amaya, then was sure to catch my eye too, waggling his brows.

Fucker knew exactly what he was doing, and if King searched any of this footage and saw that, he would definitely want to strangle Theo.

Always pushing. That was Theo's problem. He was never happy to just *be*.

The questions then moved to the director and actors, and once they were finished, Theo was ushered off the stage, where Amaya handed him a glass of red wine and whispered something in his ear. His fingers tightened around the stem of his glass.

I wasn't close enough to catch her exact words, but if I were a betting man, I would guess she'd told him to go and mingle. Something Theo was more than ready to be done with, judging by his reaction.

It was subtle, but when you were watching him as closely as I was, you caught it. He was over this. But knowing it was his family's name on the line, he made the rounds, shaking hands with the producer and lead actor as I tracked his movements from the shadows of the theatre. As the night wore on, I noticed his smile starting to slip, until he turned to talk to a VIP fan and his eyes caught on me.

Like a switch had been flipped, Theo's entire demeanor seemed to brighten, and the fact my presence did that to him from across the room had my dick feeling all kinds of things. But playing his part like the professional

he was, Theo turned that charm on the woman standing directly in front of him and spent the next five minutes answering every question she fired at him.

When she finally took her leave, Theo turned his back on me and began to make his way back toward Amaya at the front of the room. I slinked through the shadows at the edges, blending into the rest of security like I was one of them.

That was when my phone vibrated. I pulled it out of my pocket thinking it might be King checking in, until I saw—

THEO:
I'm bored.

I immediately snapped my head up to see him standing with his back to me, a fresh glass of red in his hand. When the hell had he texted that? And how? He was too damn quick with those hands.

Nope. Don't even think about that.

So? What do you want me to do about it?

THEO:
Make an excuse for me to leave.

I'm not here to entertain or remove you from your duties. I'm a ghost, remember?

THEO:
A really fucking hot ghost, and last time I checked, you were here to make sure I'm safe.

I glanced up from my phone to where Theo had turned to face me as he casually sipped his wine.

You're at a movie premiere. You have security.

THEO:

And you. So make an excuse for me.

No.

THEO:

Give me an excuse to come to you.

Definitely no.

THEO:

What about ON you?

He was fucking insane. Was he really asking if he could come on me surrounded by an entire room of people? He was in public, for fuck's sake. Every person had a camera phone, and yet here he was, *sexting me*.

It was kind of hot, actually.

King would never have been so obvious, so public in his desire. But as I dared a look in Theo's direction, that ballsy fucker was licking his lips like he wanted to lick my dick.

Stop texting me. You're supposed to be paying attention, acting like you're thrilled about your family's involvement in the movie. Ties to America. Diplomatic relations and all that.

THEO:

Me on my knees for the former US president's son promotes healthy diplomatic relations, don't you think?

Christ he was persistent. The fact that his words also made my dick hard was something I was choosing to ignore at this very moment, though, because really? Here, of all places?

I'm not answering you anymore. FOCUS.

THEO:

Why? Are your hands too busy?

Hello? Shep?

Make an excuse for me to leave or I will.

I'm serious. You're not gonna like what I do.

Okay, then. Don't say I didn't warn you.

I watched as Theo pocketed his phone, arched a brow at me, and then dangled the wine glass between his fingertips dangerously.

No, he wouldn't. He would *not* make a scene in front of all these people.

But as he lifted his glass to his lips and I watched the wine tip too far to the side, I was beginning to realize there wasn't much Theo wouldn't do to get what he wanted.

And right now, he wanted me.

OceanofPDF.com

19

THEO

PEOPLE OFTEN CALLED me impulsive, accused me of acting without thinking. But as the red wine soaked through my pristine white shirt to dampen my skin, I knew *exactly* what I was doing.

I'd been on my best behavior for close to four hours now, and that was about three hours and fifty minutes too long. Something my sexy shadow apparently disagreed with, since he wouldn't assist in my escape plan.

But that was okay—I didn't need Shep to tell me how to make an exit. I'd been scheming and plotting vanishing acts since I was made to attend royal functions at the tender age of learning how to walk. Disappearing from a packed theatre would be a breeze, and to prove it, I was going to do it in the most outrageous way possible.

"Theo, your shirt," Amaya said as she took the now-empty glass from me. I reached for the damp material and began to pull it from my pants.

"I know," I joked. "And I'm usually so *good* at swallowing."

"Theo," she admonished me, handing off our glasses to a passing waiter and snatching up a napkin to blot at the stain.

"I think that's making it worse."

Amaya let out an exasperated sigh. "How did you manage to spill your wine?"

With great ease, since that was my plan.

Now I just needed to excuse myself and exit, and Shep would have to follow.

“Just clumsy, I guess.” I looked over to see a woman with her phone up, no doubt filming my “slip,” and winked. “But I can’t go around wearing this all night.”

I reached for the bottom button and slid it free from the hole, and several women in the crowd cheered.

“Oh, you like that, do you?” I grinned and unfastened the next two, and Amaya moved in front of me and aimed a steely stare at the phones pointed in my direction.

“The prince is going to step out for a minute and get cleaned up.” She glared over her shoulder at me. “Aren’t you?”

“On my way,” I said with a wave to my captive audience. As I headed toward the front exit, I caught sight of Shep slipping in and out of the rest of the security lining the theatre wall.

My lips tipped into a devious smile as I stepped out of the main auditorium and into the empty hall, and not a minute later a strong hand gripped my arm and hauled me away from my head security guard who was posted outside the door.

It probably should’ve concerned me that he didn’t make a move to intercept Shep. But since I’d orchestrated this entire scenario in the hopes of provoking this very reaction, it would be somewhat annoying if he decided to be a hero now.

Plus, he knew Shep. He knew that *I* knew Shep. And if we didn’t get out of this hallway now, my head of security was going to know the two of us a whole lot better.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” Shep said by my ear as he directed me down the hall.

“I’m going to clean my shirt,” I said. “I *accidentally* spilled my wine.” I abruptly stopped and turned to face Shep’s glowering stare. “See?”

“It was a little hard to miss it. What the hell was that? You were supposed to be—”

“Behaving myself? I know.” I pouted. “But I told you, I was bored.”

“So you decided to make a spectacle of yourself?”

“*Non*, I decided to lure you outside so I could do nefarious things to you.”

Shep rolled his eyes, then shoved me back several steps until the door to the restroom swung open and we were hidden away from the main thoroughfare.

“Are you crazy? The last thing you should be doing is drawing more attention to yourself. Someone is trying to hurt you.”

“If they didn’t make a move in a *dark* theatre in over two hours, I highly doubt they were going to do it when the lights came up and cameras were trained on me.”

Shep’s eyes widened. “How do you know that? Maybe they were looking for a bang.”

“They wouldn’t be the only ones,” I muttered.

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me.”

As Shep cursed and lifted the cap to run a frustrated hand through his hair, I loosened my tie and started undoing the rest of my buttons.

“What are you doing?”

I paused and looked down to see my open shirt hanging on my shoulders. “I’m changing my shirt.”

Shep’s eyes narrowed. “To what?”

I studied his black button-up and smirked. “Yours. Take it off.”

“You’re out of your mind.”

“Give it to me.”

“How about no.”

“Well,” I said as I shrugged out of mine, balled it up, and tossed it on the counter behind him, “I guess I could go back in there like this.”

Shep ran scorching eyes down over my naked chest, and when they stopped at the beginning of my treasure trail, he growled. “The hell you are.”

“Then give me your shirt.”

Those eyes turned to slits, and before I could ask again, he shoved me back against the door, his large hand flat against my chest. A flush of red crept up his neck, but then he reached over and flipped the lock on the door, and the sound of it made my dick throb.

Hell. Fucking. Yes.

“I’ll give you more than my shirt,” he said, and lowered his hand down to my belt, making quick work of ripping it off. “I’ll give you my *cock*.”

Now that was what I wanted to hear, and it sounded even better coming from Shep’s full lips.

“Putain,” I managed to say before his mouth slammed onto mine with a possession and urgency that had my dick rising to full mast. The heat had

been simmering for hours, but all it took was one touch from Shep to have me raring to go.

Uptight Shep could be worn down even in the wrong place, wrong time, something I wouldn't have thought was possible. There were hundreds of people outside this door, and every one of them knew exactly who the two of us were. The consequences of being caught were disastrous, but…

That was what made this so hot.

He sucked my tongue into his mouth, then curled his arm around my waist and began to move us away from the door. I didn't give a shit where he wanted this to happen, as long as it did, but I wasn't disappointed at *all* when my ass hit the edge of a sink and he spun me to face the mirror. My pants and briefs were shoved down in an instant, leaving me bare and naked for him to watch.

"You kinky fucker." I grinned and caught his eyes in the reflection. "I ask for you to take your clothes off and somehow I lost mine."

Shep unzipped his pants and pulled out his cock. "You've been begging for this for hours."

"*Oui*. I have. I even came prepared this time." I grabbed the small packet of lube I'd slipped into my pocket earlier on the off chance I could get Shep to misbehave, and whaddya know? He'd taken the bait.

He snatched the packet out of my hand and trailed it down the length of my spine, then farther to flirt with the crack of my ass. "It won't be any less rough," he warned.

The memory of the brutal way he'd taken me the day of the wedding flashed through my mind, and I shivered in anticipation.

"Good," I said, widening my stance and gripping either side of the sink.

I watched as Shep's hands plumped my ass cheeks, and even as he licked his lower lip, I could see the indecision warring across his face. He wanted to but felt he shouldn't. I didn't know whether the "shouldn't" part came from where we were, who we were, or if it was King that popped into his mind at that moment, but I wouldn't let any of that interfere with getting what I wanted.

And that was Shep's cock in my ass.

I pushed back on him, and that seemed to snap him out of wherever he'd been and into action. With his teeth, he ripped the packet open and coated his dick, but instead of immediately driving into me the way I expected him to, he trailed his finger between my cheeks and watched me

in the mirror. I hadn't expected him to tease me, not now, when we didn't have time. But as the pad of his finger pressed up against my entrance, I exhaled and relished the way his thick digit slid into me. Slow and sure, followed by another finger scissoring inside, making me wish we had all the time in the world to actually explore each other.

I knew whatever this was between us didn't lend itself to that. These were quick fucks on stolen time, a way to relieve stress with each other and nothing more.

"Dammit, Shep," I groaned, pushing back on him. "Give me your dick or I'll get myself off."

"You still think you're the boss here?" He drew his fingers out of me and teased my ass again. "You think I'll let you top from the bottom?"

"Shep, *je jure devant Dieu…*" The loss of any part of him inside me was acute, and I was starting to feel a little desperate. I wrapped my hand around my stiff prick and began to jerk myself, needing all this pent-up sexual tension to ease if I had to go back out there, amongst a crowd.

Shep leaned in, his mouth by my ear. "Beg me for it."

"What?"

"You heard me. Beg for my cock."

I didn't know what was wrong with me—Shep's order turned me on, and my heart beat a little faster, my breathing coming out heavy as I said, "I want it."

A cruel smirk tipped one side of his mouth, his exhale against my neck making me shiver. "You can do better than that. Or do you not want this?" The thick head of his cock nudged against my entrance but didn't go any farther.

It was really too bad I was desperate for it, because I would've loved to watch his face as I zipped back up without a care.

But I couldn't. Not when I knew how good the next few minutes would be.

"Je vais te faire payer ça," I said. "Fuck me, Shep. *Please*."

Before the "please" was out of my mouth, he shoved inside me, leaving me gasping for breath.

Fuck yes. This was exactly what I wanted, what I'd had to beg for, and it was worth it already. I wasn't pushed up against a wall this time, unable to see him; I was watching every second of this scorching-hot rendezvous.

Time wasn’t on our side, and Shep didn’t waste any of it, slamming into me fast and hard, forcing me to tighten my grip on the sink. He knew just how to work me over, just what I craved. I couldn’t keep my eyes off him in the mirror as he pounded into me. He hadn’t even bothered to take off his clothes, but somehow that made this even hotter—an illicit hookup in the bathroom with a man no one even knew was here. They’d all die if they knew Shep had been lurking all night, and *I’d* die if the bastard didn’t make me come in the next two minutes.

He kicked my legs open wider, and the angle forced him even deeper inside me. The shock of him, the fullness and stretch I felt, forced me to drop my head to get my bearings.

“You fuck like a maniac.” My breath came out in ragged pants, but I had no shame, not when I was getting exactly what I’d asked for. Only my cock was missing out on the action, because between Shep’s punishing grip on my hips and my holding on for dear life, my erection wasn’t getting the rub-down it deserved.

Didn’t matter. I’d be coming like a geyser any second anyway.

“Look at yourself, *prince*,” Shep said. “Look at what I do to you.”

“Is that an order?”

“You’re goddamn right it is.” He stilled inside me, a threat if I didn’t do what he asked, and I lifted my head and locked eyes with his in the mirror. He gave a cocky smile and began to move again, slowly at first, drawing out my pleasure and making me groan with need, and then faster. All the while we kept our eyes on each other, and it was hard to miss how needy I was: pupils blown, skin flushed, my dick so hard that arousal beaded at the head and dripped onto the floor.

Shep was right. He made a mess out of me.

“Oh, *mon Dieu*,” I gasped. “Right there.”

He wrapped his arm around my waist to brace me, or maybe to hold me even closer as he hammered inside me. I could feel my orgasm hovering right there on the edge, rising until Shep’s cock hit my prostate.

I lost it.

Shep had to cover my mouth at the guttural sound I made as I came everywhere. He didn’t slow down, didn’t give me an ounce of reprieve, just continued to thrust into me and use my body for his pleasure.

And watching him come apart because of me? Hottest shit ever.

“When I pull out, I want you on…your…knees,” he gritted out.

My first instinct was to fight against his words, because that was what we did, our dynamic—upping the ante for each other with all this combative sexual tension.

Then I remembered what I'd sent him in a text, telling him that I wanted to come on him. That was what he wanted. To mark me. Which was why when he pulled out of me, I hit my knees without another thought.

With his impressive dick in hand, Shep jerked himself off and aimed for my chest.

He could've used that opportunity to make me beg again, but he didn't, too far gone to stop the hot jet of cum that sprayed across my skin. It hit my pecs, my collarbone, my neck, coating me in his arousal. Feeling cheeky, I opened my mouth, daring him to give me a taste, and Shep moved in over me, letting his cock hover over my mouth and drip down my throat.

Mmm, the taste of him was unlike anything else, so decadent on my tongue that if I were going to beg for anything, it was more of him. I savored it and licked my lips before finally swallowing.

I didn't know how Shep managed to be so damn composed, not even breathing heavily after all that exertion, already zipping up his pants. His face, however, showed just how hot he found the whole thing, so between that and the orgasm, I'd gotten just what I came for. Pun fully intended.

Shep offered his hand to help me off the floor, and as I got to my feet, I looked down at the mess he'd made all over me and smirked.

"I think I should go back out there just like this."

"Somehow, I wouldn't put it past you to do that."

"Maybe I like the thought of having you all over me in front of everyone." I leaned in and nipped at his lower lip, catching it between my teeth. Before I could suck on it, he groaned and pulled away.

"You have to go. And not like that."

He snatched a paper towel from the automatic dispenser and slapped it against my cum-covered chest, and I chuckled. I loved seeing Shep so put out as he unbuttoned his shirt, his lips pressed into a thin line.

Oh, right. I'd spilled wine all over mine.

It was with some reluctance that I wiped my chest down, wishing I didn't have to go back out there and play to the public. I couldn't complain, though—I'd gotten exactly what I wanted, and in spectacular fashion, too.

It also made the rest of my workday more bearable, once Shep put on my red-stained shirt and tried in vain to button his jacket to hide it.

“Looking like a clumsy fucker there, Mr. Winchester. Do be careful with the wine next time,” I said with a grin as I checked myself over in the mirror, making sure there were no traces of what we’d just done. The press would have a field day with *that*.

Shep was doing the same, those keen eyes scanning me before he walked me to the door and unlatched the lock.

“No more texts,” he said, all business again, no sign of the sex beast who’d just fucked me. “Try to behave.”

The man was going to have to live with disappointment.

“Behave? Don’t you know me well enough by now, Shep?” I took hold of his tie and pulled him in close, tasting his breath on my lips but not giving in to the urge to kiss them. “I don’t know the meaning of the word.”

OceanofPDF.com

20

SHEP

Location: Osaka, Japan

WHILE PRINCE JEAN and Princess Katerina jetted off to the next stop on their honeymoon, Theo—*Prince* Theo—and I headed to the Osaka World Expo in Japan.

The months-long expo featured designated days for different countries and organizations to share their culture and promote international goodwill, and for Monaco's day, it was only right that the head of the country be present.

And that happened to be Theo at the moment. God help everyone.

Once again I had stuck to the shadows, blending in with the crowd of those visiting the Monaco pavilion to see their Mediterranean culture on full display. Or, rather, to see Theo on full display. He'd been in prime form today, charming the pants off everyone he came into contact with and reminding me of the way he did the same to me. Literally, pants dropped in bathrooms, in closets, in the back room of a church. It was like we were averse to a bed, which meant a place like this was exactly where Theo would choose to make a move.

I had no doubt he would've—if he hadn't been approached by an entirely too good-looking and young Japanese billionaire.

All that charm Theo had been throwing to the crowd was suddenly focused on one man, and I didn't want to acknowledge the way that chafed, just a little.

“You’re not jealous, are you?” Theo said when we were back at the hotel later that night. He’d showered and changed into something a little less formal, but the dark slacks and soft cashmere sweater still looked damn good on him.

Fucker.

“Not in the slightest,” I said, shooting off a message to Lachlan and then pocketing my phone.

“Mhmm.” Theo walked over to me, getting so close that his body brushed up against mine. “So you’re fine with my going to dinner with Yuki tonight? Good with waiting outside while we have…dessert after?”

“I don’t give a damn who you fuck, Theo.”

His blue eyes dropped to my lips, and he leaned in, angling his head like he was going to kiss me. I could taste his sweet breath on every inhale but didn’t move, not about to be the first to break.

Then he said, “Keep telling yourself that, Shep,” and reached around me to grab his watch off the nightstand.

I blinked, the sexual tension between us crackling, but I’d be damned if I admitted to it—or shared the fact that I wasn’t thrilled about having to tag along on his fucking date.

Consider Shep your new shadow, King had said, giving the order without consulting me first. I was going along with it, but watching some asshole make eyes at Theo all night was *not* the way I’d wanted to spend the next few hours.

I threw on a casual black jacket and shoved a hat on, my irritation rising. Across the room, Theo chuckled and didn’t try to hide the condoms he slipped into his pocket.

I don’t care, I told myself. *He can eat with whoever he wants, be with whoever he wants. I don’t fucking* care.

“Oh, I forgot to mention Yuki’s picking me up, so you’ll need to find your own ride.”

My head jerked up, and when I saw Theo’s smirk, I considered causing him bodily harm so his ass wouldn’t be going anywhere.

Instead I sucked in a breath through my nose and tried to brush off his attempts to rile me up. “It wouldn’t be smart to ride together anyway,” I said, and pulled out my phone to call for a car.

Theo gave himself a final once-over in the mirror, plucked lint off his shoulder, and caught my eyes in the reflection. “Then I guess we’re on the

same page.”

“Guess so.”

His phone vibrated on the table, and he picked it up and checked the message. “I’m out.”

Thank fucking God. Another second alone with him in this room and I might’ve resorted to something ridiculous, like tying him to the bed to keep him from leaving.

Not because I was jealous, but because I knew Theo was going to take every opportunity to make my life hell tonight.

Resigned to my fate, I allowed enough time for him to exit the hotel before I followed after his date’s sleek black Lexus.

Blue Bird’s Rooftop Terrace was a restaurant located on the top of Miraiza Osaka-Jo, right in front of the Osaka Castle. The historic building had been renovated and turned into a multipurpose facility, including restaurants, souvenir shopping, and even a samurai and ninja experience if one wanted it.

But right now it was the seating in the surrounding park that interested me, since I’d instructed Theo to reserve a table at the edge of the restaurant so I could keep an eye on him. I moved out of the lamplight and into position, then pulled my binoculars out of my jacket pocket and aimed them at the rooftop terrace.

I studied the other guests taking their seats for the evening, checking to see if anyone pinged my radar as familiar. Maybe someone who knew Theo, knew any of us Kings, but nothing registered or set off any alarm bells.

That was good, but considering we were still no closer to knowing who’d sent the videos of Theo, and the threat, it didn’t make me feel any better about his being so far away from me.

At least, that was what I was telling myself. It had nothing to do with the fact he was with someone else, because Theo was capable of taking care of himself in hand-to-hand combat. In fact, he was a deadly fucking weapon. But I was there on the off chance he didn’t see it coming.

So that meant watching and waiting.

And waiting.

And waiting.

It was around the time my stomach growled that I realized I probably should’ve grabbed myself something to eat before my stakeout, especially

when I was sitting here watching Theo chow down on a delicious-looking seafood dish.

I'd decided to focus on that rather than the way Yuki was smiling and laughing at nearly every single word he said. But of course, focusing on Theo's food also meant staring at his mouth, and that was a distraction all on its own.

I lowered my binoculars, irritated all over again that I was stuck sitting out here, watching over Theo when I'd rather be—

What? What, Shep? What would you rather be doing?

Definitely not sitting across from Theo and watching him smile and laugh at something *I* said. Because it would be fucking crazy to actually think about going on a date with him.

Completely and utterly insane.

A fat drop of rain hitting the back of my neck pulled me from that alarming thought, and I reached up to check I hadn't imagined it. Sure enough, my fingers came away wet. As if it wasn't already bad enough that I was stuck here monitoring Theo's date, now it was going to rain on me? Great. That was just fucking *great*.

I tugged the jacket's hood up over my ball cap, then zipped it up under my chin. Just as I was about to see what the happy couple up at the restaurant planned to do with this unexpected turn of events, my phone began to vibrate.

If this is Theo, I am going to—

Not Theo. King. And seeing his name there only made my annoyance triple. This was his fault. All of it. My sitting here in the rain. My watching Theo be wined and dined. And let's not forget the fact that I even cared about those two things now. *That* was King's fault too.

If he hadn't sent me to the wedding to "watch" Theo, then I wouldn't be in this mess.

I answered the phone with all that pent-up anger bubbling right under the surface.

"*What?*"

Okay, so maybe it was *on* the surface.

"Hello to you too," King said as I brought the binoculars back up to see the waitstaff had opened umbrellas over each of the tables so patrons could continue their dinner by candlelight uninterrupted.

Kill me now.

“Yeah, hi,” I said, not in the mood for casual chitchat as the rain began to fall a little harder.

“Is this a bad time?”

“Well, it’s not a great one.” Was I being extra surly? Yes. But King would be acting the same way if the shoe were on the other foot. Not that I could imagine him ever sitting out in the rain monitoring the guy he wanted to fuck while he was on a date with someone else.

Or maybe he had done that. Zac and East *had* been fucking before King. That was the rumor, anyway.

But I didn’t want to think about that. Not then. Not now. Not ever.

“Do you need something? You must, considering you’re calling before nine. What’d you do, set your alarm?”

Silence met my questions, and when it seemed I wasn’t going to get a response, I wondered if maybe there’d been another message. Another email sent.

“I’m calling for an update,” King said, caution lacing his voice. “But you seem preoccupied—”

“You’re the one who sent me to babysit.”

“Ah, okay. That explains it.”

I frowned. “Explains what?”

“Your mood. You were never good at sitting still. Even worse at watching.”

My mind immediately detoured to the gutter, but I shoved that aside and barked, “I’m fine.”

“You sound annoyed.”

“You would be too if you were sitting outside in the rain.”

Seeming to pick up that I was in no mood to talk, King quickly changed the subject. “I assume everything’s going all right with Theo?”

“If you define all right as his currently being on a date with one of Japan’s most eligible bachelors, then yes, he’s fucking dandy.”

“I see. I assume he’s taking great pleasure at making you suffer as his babysitter?”

He had no idea. But I could hardly confess to Theo’s teasing me about being jealous.

“You know how he gets when someone is sent to make sure he behaves."

“Painful.”

“And then some. He’s going to drag this dinner out for hours, and now that it’s raining—”

“He’ll take even more pleasure in it.” King chuckled. “Just remember, you’re there to keep him safe from others. If you want to strangle him, I’ll authorize it.”

I laughed despite myself, because maybe, just maybe, I’d take King up on that.

“Good to know. Anything new in your neck of the woods?”

“No. Alessio is just about killing himself trying to work out the IP addresses and where the messages are being bounced from, but so far nothing.”

I was sure that pissed Alessio off to no end. But he’d work it out—he always did. Plus, I had my own problems to deal with.

One in particular, who was now leaning across the table and stealing a bit of food off his date’s plate.

Fuck my life. “Well, let me know if anything changes.”

“Is that your way of saying goodbye?”

“It is.”

“Okay, okay. Oh, and Shep?”

“Hmm?”

“Try to stay dry.”

“Fuck off.”

He chuckled. “Bye to you too.”

OceanofPDF.com

21

THEO

I COULDN'T SEE Shep, but I knew he was watching. I could feel his eyes on me from wherever he hid in the shadows, though every time I'd casually scanned around us, I couldn't find him.

It was amazing how someone as well known as Shep could so easily disappear when he wanted to. I guessed the same could be said for me, but considering I wasn't usually the one being babysat, this was new territory. If it was anyone else, I'd be fucking livid. But having Shep watch me, now *that* was something I could get behind.

Or rather, some*one*.

Because make no mistake—I'd let him take control during our encounters so far, but giving Shep a taste of his own medicine was in my plans. There was nothing I wanted more than to have him on his knees for me, bent over for me, any way I could have him, and *that* was why I was singularly focused on driving him crazy in the meantime.

I leaned toward Yuki holding his fork out to me, speared with a delicious black tiger shrimp. I held his eyes as I wrapped my mouth around the tines and slid it off with my teeth.

Wherever Shep was watching, he wasn't enjoying this scene half as much as I was.

"Mmm." I closed my eyes, savoring the flavor, and when I opened them again, Yuki's attention was on my mouth. The man was attractive, I couldn't deny that. If my cock wasn't so focused on getting inside Shep, I would definitely be taking Yuki back to my presidential suite. From the way he

was looking at me, I could tell he assumed that was to be the eventual outcome tonight. It almost made me feel guilty about using him as a prop… almost.

My phone vibrated in my pocket for the first time since we'd arrived.

"My apologies, I need to take this," I said, and pulled it out. When I saw the message and who it was from, it was all I could do not to grin.

SHEP:
Tell him to back off.

A few seconds later, another one came through.

SHEP:
He looks two seconds away from climbing into your lap.

Jealous?

I typed back.

SHEP:
King said no unnecessary press. Fucking in a restaurant is a surefire way to disregard his orders.

Who said anything about fucking? Maybe I'll just let him suck me off under the table.

As I sent that off and imagined the explosive reaction I was about to get, I looked up and gave Yuki an apologetic smile. "Sorry, work is never ending."

"I understand," he said, but then I felt his foot rub up against mine. "I'm a busy man too, but perhaps we can set work aside for a few hours."

"You're absolutely right." Shep hadn't sent a response yet, but maybe it was better to make him wait. See how frustrated my silence could make him. I pocketed my phone and gave Yuki my undivided attention. "Now, where were we?"

"You were telling me how long you'll be in town."

“Not long enough, I’m afraid.” I let out an exaggerated exhale, like I was really torn up about the fact we wouldn’t be spending a week rolling around on the mattress. Not that he wasn’t tempting, because he was. A young, handsome billionaire with a great ass shooting his shot definitely had my dick interested…just not enough.

My phone vibrated against my thigh, and I hid my smile of satisfaction while choosing to ignore it.

“Give me a few hours and I’ll make it worth your while,” he said.

Damn. I had to respect the way he was putting what he wanted on the table.

I lifted my glass of white wine and teased the edge of it along my lower lip. “Now, *that* I have no doubt about.”

Another vibration in my pocket. Another. And another. I was dying to see what Shep was saying.

Of course he had to get all hot and possessive when I couldn’t flirt back.

“So what are we waiting for? Let me get the check,” Yuki said.

I reached over the table and put a hand on the arm he was raising. “As much as it pains me, I think I’m going to have to decline that very tempting offer.”

“Oh.” Yuki slumped back in his seat. “My mistake. I misread things.”

“No, you didn’t. It’s just the time zones are catching up with me, and I wouldn’t be able to give you my…full attention.”

My phone went off again, and Yuki glanced down at my lap. “Are you sure that’s it?”

I knew what he was asking. Was I involved with someone else?

“I think I’ll go and take care of that check.” Yuki pushed away from the table. “You should take your call. It’s clear you have…*business* to deal with.”

I felt a twinge of guilt as he walked away from our table, but not enough to stop me from pulling out my phone and reading the rapid-fire texts from the frustrated man watching over me.

SHEP:

Time to make your excuses, Theo. I’m calling your car.

Now you’re not responding? You’re such a shit.

Say goodbye, Theo. NOW.

It’s raining. I’m wet. You’re going to pay for it if you DON’T GET THE FUCK UP AND LEAVE NOW.

While I knew he meant that last text as a threat, that was the farthest thing from my mind as I read it. Shep was in a *mood*, one that was pushing every single button I had, and if it wasn’t for the fact I was here with someone else, I would’ve already left.

But since that wasn’t an option, and I wanted to hear his pissed-off growl in my ear, I hit his number and wasn’t surprised when he answered before the first ring.

“Get downstairs, *now*.”

I chuckled and glanced out from the terrace to the park below, where I knew he was positioned. There were lamps sprinkled throughout the public area, but enough trees to provide coverage and shadows for him to hide in.

“But I’m not finished eating my…dinner.”

“Keep pushing, Theo.”

“And you’ll do what? Oh, wait, you mentioned something about making me pay. Would you care to elaborate?”

That sexy growl hit my ears and vibrated down my spine, making my balls tighten.

“Is that a no?”

“That’s a *you’re on a date with another man.*”

“Oh, so you *are* jealous.”

“What I am is sick of sitting out here watching you fawn all over your latest boy toy.”

Bullshit. That wasn’t the issue at all, and we both knew it. The difference was that I was happy to admit it, whereas Shep was still in the throes of denial.

“Then admit you’re jealous.”

“Excuse me?”

I glanced up to see Yuki on his way back to the table. “Tell me you’re jealous and I’ll get up and leave now—with you. If you don’t, we both know I have other options.”

Shep didn’t need to know I’d already made my excuses to Yuki. Especially if this finally pushed him to admit what we both already knew.

“If you think for one second I’m going to sit outside this playboy’s penthouse and wait for you to fuck his brains out, you’ve got another thing

coming.”

“Then admit you’re jealous.”

“Theo—”

“Admit it,” I pushed. “Then I’ll come home and fuck *your* brains out instead.”

Oui, *I said it.* What we were both thinking. What we both wanted. The real question was: would Shep take me up on the offer?

“Would you look at that? Yuki’s on his way back.” When Shep stayed stubbornly silent, I whispered, “Admit it and I’m out the door and yours. Five… Four… Three… Two—”

“I’m jealous.”

I wasn’t sure who was more surprised by his admission. But the second it was out of his mouth and swimming around my head, I was on my feet.

“Five minutes,” I said, looking over the edge of the roof, searching him out, but he remained elusive as ever. *Well, not for long, Mr. Winchester.* “Be ready for me.”

OceanofPDF.com

22

SHEP

EVERY PART OF me was drenched, soaking through the seats of the Rolls-Royce Phantom as Theo took his sweet-ass time coming down to the car, and to say I was in a mood was an understatement.

All the sexual looks Yuki was throwing at Theo, and then the way Theo returned every one of them like he had every intention of going home with him tonight. Eating his goddamn food off Yuki's fork.

Jesus Christ, it was enough to have me heaving up my dinner. Oh, wait, I hadn't eaten dinner because I'd been busy sitting out in the rain, watching for any threats to Theo's stupid ass like he wasn't the biggest threat to himself.

It's enough to make me want to—

The car door opened suddenly and Theo slid into the seat beside me, perfectly dry and wearing a smug smile that had my rage bubbling to the surface.

Amusement glinted in his blue eyes as he looked me up and down. "Did you get into a fight with a fire hose?"

The fucker. I ground my molars, my hands clenching in my lap as the car began to move.

Theo leaned in across the console separating us, getting way too close for the way I was feeling right now. "Want to play with mine?"

"Fuck off."

"Aw, you don't mean that. I did think you'd be a little happier to see me, but maybe your dick is."

He put his hand between my thighs, and while no, I hadn't been feeling even a little aroused by my night so far, the second he touched me, my cock sparked to life. It kicked against his palm before I had a chance to shove him away. A knowing grin spread across his face then, and I wanted to slap it off.

At least, that was what I told myself, because the urge to bite those taunting lips was also way too strong—and *fuck* that pissed me off. Why did he have to look so good? Why was he able to push my buttons to get what he wanted?

I should just throw him out of the car now and save myself the headache.

"You're already wet," he murmured as he nuzzled in to nibble along my ear. "Coming all over you won't make any difference."

"That's not happening." I forced him back on his side of the car, and his pout almost made me relent. But I'd already given him enough tonight. I'd been wet and miserable, and to get him in the car, I'd told him I was jealous. Now he'd use that ammo for the rest of our lives.

"Are you really going to do this again?" he said, letting out an exaggerated sigh before going into mimic mode. "'No, no, Theo, I don't want you, we can't do this, I *don't* think you're the sexiest man I've ever seen, I'd never put my cock inside you— Oh, wait, well, maybe just this once.'" He arched a brow, waiting for me to deny it.

"And every time it was a mistake." I looked away, out the darkened window, avoiding his stare, but he wasn't done with me yet.

"C'est des conneries," he said, and then in English, "Bullshit, Shep. You've already admitted you're hot for me, and obviously I'm here now and not in Yuki's bed, so let's not waste any more time."

"Hot for you?" I snorted and shook my head. "You're delusional."

"And you're jealous."

That fucking word stabbed me in the gut, because what the hell had I been thinking, admitting that?

A low chuckle emanated out of Theo as he moved across the tight space of the car and straddled my lap. He was warm and dry, uncaring of how soaked I was as he tangled his fingers in my hair and brought his face down to mine. He was so close he could've kissed me, but he stayed right where he was, like he was *daring* me to try to push him away again.

“You were jealous. Jealous of the way I gave another man my attention. Jealous when he invited me back to his place—”

“I didn’t know—”

Theo pressed his finger against my lips, shutting me up. “Oh, you knew. And you were jealous just thinking of me in someone else’s bed. Letting him fuck me. Imagining me fucking him…”

“Stop it.”

“Why? Jealous?”

OceanofPDF.com

23

THEO

ANGER FLASHED IN Shep's eyes, and a second later his hands were on my ass, hauling me onto his lap. "You like that, don't you?"

"Oui." I slid my finger along his slick lower lip. "Because the idea of someone other than me fucking you tonight would make me lose my mind."

Shep's gaze dropped to my mouth, and I brought a finger up to my lips and sucked.

"Pretty sure of yourself, aren't you?" he said.

I rolled my hips forward, grinding my covered cock atop his. "Pretty sure of you, too."

Shep groaned. I reached for the zipper of his jacket and drew it down, and he seemed to finally give in to what was happening between us, his head falling back on the head rest.

"You're a fucking menace."

"Mhmm," I agreed as I shoved the jacket out of my way, then his soaked black tee came into view, and fuck me, the way it molded to his hard body, outlining every sharp angle, had me gliding my hands down to the bottom and tugging it up and out of my way. "But tonight I'm *your* menace."

"Christ," Shep muttered as I dragged the shirt all the way up his chest and then leaned in to bite his nipple. The hands on my ass flexed, and the dick rubbing on mine jerked, as I soothed my bite with a rapacious tongue. Then I kissed my way to the other one and subjected it to the same torture.

Shep's rumble of pleasure told me he was done with the protesting portion of the evening—so did the way he stroked up my back, flexing his hands around the back of my neck, holding me in place.

Oh, you like that? I couldn't help my grin as I teased and tormented him, scraping my teeth across his sensitive skin until he was writhing in his seat under me.

"Theo… Fuck…"

I raised my head, and the lust swirling in his eyes immediately put me on the attack. I released his shirt and grabbed the back of his neck, pulling him forward so I could take his lips in the kiss I'd been thinking about all night.

I thrust my tongue inside his mouth, and received a sinful sound of pleasure as my reward. I wanted inside him, and since I couldn't really do that in the tight confines of the car, the next best thing was getting a nice, deep taste of him.

I gripped his face and angled his head the exact way I wanted, and when Shep took hold of my hips and held me in place, I knew he wanted the same thing. I shoved inside and tangled with him in one of the hottest tongue fucks of my life. Then he dragged a hand down between my legs and began to massage my dick.

"*Putain,*" I said as I ripped my mouth off his and stared down into his too-handsome face. "Unzip me."

Shep's jaw tensed as his brain rebelled against the order. But then he reached for the button of my pants and flicked it open. I stroked his wet hair and gripped the back of it, again tangling my fingers in the thick strands.

"Keep going."

"Stop bossing— *Fucking hell.*" He bared his teeth at my vicious pull, and I grinned.

"Keep. Going."

Shep licked over his lower lip, but then slowly lowered my zipper.

I hadn't been sure he'd follow my orders, wasn't sure he'd ever relinquish that kind of control. And though it might be a *reluctant* handover of the reins, it appeared that Mr. America was definitely submitting to me tonight—and wasn't *that* a fucking rush?

"Take it out."

With his eyes on me, Shep shoved my pants apart then down under my ass. When I bucked my hips forward, he slipped his fingers into the elastic

of my briefs.

“Do it,” I ordered him, wanting his hand on my cock almost as much as I wanted to shove it inside him.

“And if I don’t?”

I clenched my fingers at the back of his head as I narrowed my eyes on him. “Then I’ll make you pay for it later.”

He aimed his gaze off to the side and out the window. “Guess I’m about to find out,” he said, and dropped his hand. “We’re back at the hotel. Unless you wanna finish this here?”

I whipped my head to the side to see that indeed we were back at the hotel. I hadn’t even noticed we were close to anything other than an orgasm.

“I don’t think so,” I said, and let go of his hair, climbing off his lap and looking down at the erection straining against his pants. “The first time I’m going to fuck you isn’t going to be in the back of a car. Oh no, you are going to be face down in my bed.”

Shep’s eyes widened a fraction, but then he reached down and gave himself a hard stroke.

“Get inside, Mr. Winchester—we have some diplomatic relations to attend to.”

OceanofPDF.com

24

THEO

THREATENING SHEP WITH having “diplomatic relations” with someone else had turned out well for me, because that green-eyed monster roared to life—and was currently ripping my shirt off.

Buttons flew across the room, pinging against the marble tile of my suite, followed by my pants falling to the floor. Shep’s jacket was the next to go, and then I took great pleasure in peeling every stitch of wet clothing off his body.

Fuck, the man was hot. Every time I saw him now it was my first thought, something I wouldn’t have believed before Jean’s wedding. It was always there, of course, in the back of my mind, the realization that he was one of the sexiest men in the world, but it wasn’t an active thought until the day he fucked me with abandon. And now that he had my attention, he refused to let go. Even as he continued to try to fight the attraction between us like he wasn’t going to eventually relent.

“Did I mention you’re hot as fuck all wet?” I said as his waterlogged pants and briefs hit the floor with a *slap*, leaving him deliciously naked. “I should make you sit outside in the rain more often.”

Shep growled in response, and I felt his muscles tense only seconds before he threw me back on the bed. “*That* won’t be happening again.”

“Too bad.” I licked my lips as I ran my eyes over every inch of him. I wasn’t lying about how good he looked wet, but damn, just seeing him not so buttoned up had my cock jerking.

In all the time we'd stolen together, I'd never gotten a chance to actually look at Shep—*all* of Shep. He'd been too busy pinning me against walls or forcing me to my knees…or taking me from behind in bathrooms. All the while it was me who lost my clothes, and I'd never realized how unfair that was until this moment.

Those ice-blue eyes stared down at me, taking me in the same way I was him, but it was the sharp lines of his muscles, his skin glistening from the rain, and his dick jutting in my direction that made me unable to look away.

Shep Winchester the third was a work of fucking art.

And I was *not* about to admit that to him.

I also wasn't letting him take charge tonight, like he was already trying to do. That fucker owed my cock some close, personal attention, and I didn't care if it was with his hand or his mouth, on his knees or on his back.

I moved up to my knees and gripped my cock, giving it several strokes as I eyed the arrogant line of Shep's jaw.

"Get on the bed, Shep."

He arched an eyebrow at me, and it was so damn sexy that my hand automatically flexed around my stiff length.

"In case you haven't noticed, I'm not one of your many minions you can order about."

"*Non*, you're not, which is what's going to make it so much fun when you finally submit."

Shep snorted and put a knee on the mattress, his huge cock taking aim at me. "Good luck with that."

"I don't need luck. I know your weaknesses."

Shep moved up the mattress to where I continued to kneel, then wrapped his hand over the top of mine, giving me a nice, strong pull.

"You think so?"

"Oh, I *know* so."

The thing was, I knew what Shep was doing. He was trying to sway me to his way of thinking, to letting him take control, and had it been the first or second time we'd been like this, then maybe I'd let him win. But he'd been coming out on top a little too often for my liking, and just because he had more muscle on me, that didn't mean I was at a disadvantage. I had a reputation for being merciless. For being impulsive and cutthroat.

It was time for me to come out on top—in *all* the ways.

I rocked forward, shoving through our fists, trailing my eyes down his damp skin. Shep's lips quirked at the side, and I let him believe for one, two, three more delicious strokes that he had the upper hand…

Then I made my move.

I pulled out of our grip, then, before he could think what I was about to do, I lunged.

I ducked and dove forward, aiming for his tight torso where I knew he had an old injury from a past mission, then barreled into him with the force of a Mack truck. I wound my arms around him and planted a knee between his, and, before he could brace himself, twisted to the left and tackled him to the bed.

Shep went down with a solid *oomph*, and before he could think twice, I was straddling him, my forearm braced against his collarbone. His chest heaved with the impact, his eyes flashed fire, and I couldn't help my smug smirk.

"That was a dirty fucking move, even for you."

I cocked my head and soaked in the sight of him laid out flat beneath me. "Ask me if I care."

"It's pretty obvious you don't," Shep said, then aimed his eyes down to where my hard dick was flush against his abs.

"Don't act like you don't like it." I rubbed myself over him, my pre-cum making a sticky trail over his smooth skin.

I lowered my head and took his bottom lip between my teeth, teasing it with bites before licking my way inside. The second our tongues touched, Shep groaned. Moments later his hands were in my hair, pulling me closer as he teased and sucked my tongue, making my cock all kinds of jealous.

I could feel him flexing between my thighs as he arched up to get deeper inside, and I dug my knees into his sides, holding him in place, not about to let him flip me to my back and one-up me yet again.

He grunted, feeling the power move. When he tore his mouth from mine and fell back to the bed, his eyes were as dark as I've ever seen. Shep was turned on, and I could almost taste the submission as he ran his hands down my back to my ass.

"Well, now what, Your Serene Highness?"

That shouldn't have made my dick hard, shouldn't have made me want him more. But something about having him naked, hard, and calling me by my royal title made me fucking *horny*.

I gripped his chin and angled his face to the side, then licked a path up his cheek to kiss his temple.

"*Now* you're going to roll over and get on your hands and knees, so I can fuck you until neither of us can walk."

Shep turned his head back until our noses all but touched. "You better mean that."

Putain. It was the first time he'd openly granted me permission, the first time he'd willingly admitted he wanted me to take him. The sound that rumbled out of me at that was downright feral.

"I've never meant anything more." I pressed a punishing kiss to his lips, pushed up, and swung my leg off him. When Shep rolled to his stomach and moved up to his hands and knees, my eyes almost rolled to the back of my damn head.

What a goddamn sight he made—thick thighs braced apart, hands flat on the mattress, arms flexed, back straight. His ass, as I moved around behind him, was high, tight, and pure perfection, and the heavy balls and weighty cock between his legs had me salivating.

"Unfuckingbelievable," I said in a voice I barely recognized as I smoothed a hand over his ass. "Spread these more."

I tapped his thigh, and Shep immediately obeyed, making my dick jerk. Then I lowered my head, sank my teeth into the firm flesh of one of his cheeks, and reached between his legs to fondle his balls.

"Fuck," he muttered, stiffening, and I trailed my fingers up the cleft of his ass and spread him wide.

"I'm going to destroy you tonight," I warned him, my warm breath on his exposed skin making him shudder. "And I'm going to start by using the thing you like the most about me…" I grabbed his other cheek and held him wide, eyeing the pucker begging me to come and play. "My mouth."

I licked a path up his narrow channel, reveling in the earthy, musky flavor of him as Shep tensed, then I zeroed in on the place we both wanted me to focus on. I licked his hole, poking and prodding him with the tip of my tongue before swirling a wet circle over him.

Shep's grunt of pleasure and the way he thrust back told me what I was doing was exactly what he needed, and more. But when I brought my thumb into the mix, pushing and stretching his tight entrance open for a deep tongue fucking, he went insane.

"Theo… *Jesus*…"

I chuckled, loving the desperate edge to his voice as I pushed my thumb inside then pulled it out. Then I switched it up, adding my index and middle finger, knowing I needed to stretch him for what I had planned. As I continued to push and pull my fingers in and out of his body, I couldn't help the savage sound that escaped me.

He was magnificent, a greedy bottom in a way I'd never imagined; so much so that I got caught up in finger-fucking him, entranced by the hard, fast way he was rocking back on me, swallowing my fingers knuckle deep —and that was when I realized he needed more. More penetration, more stimulation, more *me*.

So I lowered my head, and as I thrust my fingers inside of him and held my hand still, I licked around his stretched skin, spat on it, then promised, "I'm about to give you something even better to fuck than these."

In one quick move I pulled my hand free, and Shep groaned at the loss. But the second he felt the head of my dick lining up with his body, his shoulders tensed.

Oui, *brace yourself*, I thought as I grabbed one of his cheeks, opened him, then plunged forward, driving my cock hard and deep.

A loud shout tore from Shep's throat as he threw his head back and white-knuckled the sheet, his body sucking me inside and strangling me with its warmth and viselike grip.

My vision spotted as the pleasure raced up my spine, and it was all I could do to stay upright behind the sexy fucker.

But Shep had other ideas. He wasn't waiting around for me to get control of myself. He was a man on a mission, and being well and truly fucked was it. He pulled forward, sliding off me, then in a move straight from what I could only guess was the *Advanced Guide to Being a Power Bottom*, he accelerated back on me, his body enveloping me like a burning-hot fist.

If I didn't watch out, he would be topping me from the bottom, and I wasn't letting that happen.

I gripped his hips and dug my fingers in until the bite of my nails registered. When he cursed, I grinned and pulled out before slamming back into him with so much force that he shifted forward up the bed.

That didn't slow us down, though, merely had us anchoring ourselves to the mattress with wider stances and stronger hands before I went at him

again, my pace faster this time. The lust and desire was unrelenting as I watched his shoulders flex and bunch with every forceful thrust I delivered.

Sweat beaded on my forehead as my muscles tensed, my arousal controlling my actions as my brain left the room. I was a man crazed, a man hellbent on driving Shep out of his mind—and judging by the sounds coming from him and the frantic pace he was keeping, I was succeeding.

I was giving him the pounding he'd so desperately been begging for. The one I'd so desperately wanted to deliver. As my arms and legs started to give way and Shep trembled underneath me, I bent down over him, wrapped an arm around his waist, and took hold of that thick cock.

Shep cursed, and I sank my teeth into his shoulder. Then I started to rut into him, milking his dick as I found and hit his prostate in a way that had him jerking, stumbling, and falling face first to the bed with a cry. His ass canted upward, my cock still deep.

"Oui," I urged, not letting up for a second. *"Laisse-toi aller, Shep. Jouis pour moi."*

Shep bucked up, chasing what he wanted as I drilled him into the bed at the unrelenting pace we both needed. Then my name flew from his mouth, his entire body began to shake, and then that marvelous dick of his jerked and exploded, shooting his cum all over my hand and the bed, triggering my own orgasm.

I stroked him to completion, then released him to grab hold of his hips and bury myself inside him, where I came on a hot rush of lust. Shep collapsed under me, his legs spread apart, his face resting on the covers, and when I looked down at his spent body and saw my cum dripping out of his ass and down his thighs, I grinned.

Fuck, I could get addicted to that.

The satisfaction of knowing I'd just marked, topped, and fully dominated Shepard Winchester was almost as good as the act itself.

Almost.

OceanofPDF.com

25

THEO

Location: Cardiff, Wales

THE NEXT STOP on the royal tour was Cardiff, Wales, and I spent the first half of the twelve-hour flight catching up on some much-needed sleep. Fucking Shep into oblivion was by far one of the best nights of my life, but it did require a certain amount of stamina, especially considering I wanted a repeat. After all, the private jet *did* have a spacious bedroom in the back…

I glanced over to where Shep typed away on his laptop, catching up on work, and took advantage of his distraction to watch him. How he stayed in a full suit and tie on such a long flight instead of making himself comfortable was beyond me. I'd changed as soon as we boarded, but even his polished shoes were still on. Hell, he probably hadn't even napped, had he?

But damn he looked good. Maybe I was seeing him now through orgasm-tinted lenses, or maybe I'd just been missing out all along. I loved the fact that I got this powerful man to submit to me and enjoy every second in the same way I craved being pinned down by him.

We were evenly matched in that way, even if outside the bedroom we were complete opposites. I'd barely gotten him out of the hotel before we left to explore a little, wanting to check out some of the street food at Dotonbori, while he'd been content to stay in and order room service.

No thanks. I couldn't spend my life being a cooped-up royal, which was why being one of the Libertines had been such a lifesaver for me. I needed an outlet, otherwise all the restless energy inside me would just explode.

Kind of like I had inside of Shep last night.

That memory had my lips twitching, and I bit down on my thumbnail and relived it over and over again until Shep looked up, catching my stare.

"Now that's a look that means you're up to no good," he said, reaching for his glass—of water, what the fuck—and taking a sip.

"I'm always up to no good. You like that about me, though."

"Do I?"

"You do. You want that devil on your shoulder encouraging all those dirty thoughts you try to keep to yourself."

He shook his head, but one side of that sexy-as-sin mouth curved up. "You're a menace."

"You've mentioned that. And yet you still let me fuck you."

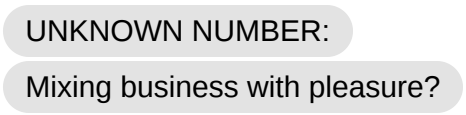
Shep's eyes moved from me to the flight attendant who had stopped by my seat to top up my glass of cognac, and the way his expression turned thoughtful had me smirking.

I took a sip and then nodded in his direction. "Make sure to top up his water, since he's living wild over there."

Shep put his hand up. "I'm good, Josie, thanks."

"Of course, Mr. Winchester."

As she headed out of the cabin, my phone vibrated on the seat beside me, and I pulled up the text, expecting it to be Amaya with her laundry list of instructions.



I frowned at the message before realizing it must've been a wrong number and tossed my cell back on the seat. That didn't happen often, not when Alessio's abilities meant keeping us off the spam lists, but maybe someone had misdialed.

A few seconds later, my phone went off again, only this time they'd sent a photo. I didn't blink as I stared at the image, my whole body going still.

What the fuck?

I made the picture bigger and could clearly see the moment I'd kissed Shep on the neck yesterday while standing in line for takoyaki. What wasn't shown was the way he'd pushed me back seconds later, telling me not to do that in public.

UNKNOWN NUMBER:

What will your illustrious leader think about this new development?

Wait…illustrious leader? Whoever this was knew about King? Or was I reading too much into that?

How the hell did they get this photo?

I lifted my eyes to Shep, who'd gone back to working on his laptop, and a strange, uneasy feeling settled in the pit of my stomach.

This was the asshole who'd doctored the video. The same one who'd threatened me and was now apparently adding stalking to his list of crimes.

I ground my molars as I tried to think of a way to call this fucker and get to the bottom of whatever shit they were pulling. But being an unknown number meant I couldn't dial out, only respond via text.

"Theo?"

"Huh?" My head snapped up, and when my eyes locked with Shep's, I did my best to mask my annoyance at what I'd just been looking at.

"Something wrong? You went quiet."

Trying to play it off, I plastered on my best smirk. "I can do that occasionally."

"Yes, but you're usually sleeping."

"You would know."

Shep lowered his eyes over me and then gave a slow nod. "Yes, I would. So tell me, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, I just—" My phone picked that exact moment to vibrate where I'd laid it face down on the armrest.

I flexed my fingers around the device as if I could crush it, and when it stopped, I looked back to Shep.

"Who's that?"

"No one," I answered a little too fast.

"Is it Yuki?"

“Who?”

Shep rolled his eyes and closed his laptop. “Your playboy date, genius. How soon they forget.”

Oh, right. Unfortunately for Yuki, I’d fucked him out of my system with Shep. The only thing I remembered from that date was the tiger shrimp.

“*Non*. Not Yuki.”

Shep’s eyes narrowed on me. “Why are you so agitated, then?”

Because I want to check what else this asshole just sent, and you won’t quit looking at me. That was what I wanted to say, but then Shep would demand to see the texts, and I wasn’t letting that happen.

“I’m not. I’m just restless because I’ve been sitting still too long. This flight takes forever.”

“Theo?”

“Hmm?”

“Do I look stupid to you?”

No, he looked really fucking hot. Especially with the way he was scowling now. And under any other circumstance, I’d welcome his attention, even relish in it. But why was he being so focused *now*?

“I can tell when something’s bothering you. I can also tell when you’re blowing smoke up my ass.”

I bit down on my lip, a frown pulling at my brow.

“Wow. No smartass comeback to that? I lined it up for you and everything. Now I know something is wrong with you. Give me your phone.”

Shep held his hand out, and I snorted. “Sure, Mom.”

“*Theo*.” Shep’s voice was stern in a way that made my spine stiffen. “Your phone. Now.”

Usually I’d tell him to fuck off, but the mix of anger and dread swirling into a knot in my gut was making me feel sick. Maybe sharing it would help. Plus, it did kind of involve Shep, so he was going to find out eventually. Especially if this motherfucker made good on his threat.

With a sigh, I picked up my phone and handed it over to him. When he flipped it over and saw the message, his face morphed from concern to volatile anger.

“Who the *fuck* sent this?”

“How should I know? It’s from an unknown number.”

Shep's eyes were almost bugging out of his head as he took in the image of me kissing him. "We're… You're… I told you not to kiss me in public."

"*That's* your biggest concern?"

"This very second? Yes." Shep let out a breath and shook his head. "This is what happens when you act on impulse."

I spun in my chair to face him, my jaw in my lap. "Are you serious right now? Some fucknut is out there *stalking* me, sending me photos of us together, threatening to send them to King, and you want to play the blame game? Okay, fine. I shouldn't have kissed you in public, but it's your fault for looking too fucking sexy to resist." I slumped back into my seat and crossed my arms over my chest. "I'm not going to say sorry. Not in any of the five languages I know."

"I don't want you to," Shep softly admitted. "I just wish you were a little more concerned with your own safety."

"Why?" I scoffed. "That's what you're here for."

"Theo…"

"Well, it's true, isn't it? You're here to babysit me."

"I'm here to make sure no one hurts you, yes. But it would be helpful if you cared about that too."

"I do. But I'm not about to hide inside on the off chance this loser is following me around with a camera."

"I don't want you to hide—"

"Are you sure about that?" I pursed my lips and cocked my head. "Are you really worried for my safety, or that a certain someone is going to get that photo emailed to him?"

"That's insulting."

"But true, right? We both know King would go apeshit if he found out that I was nailing his ex."

"Lovely, Theo. And for King to go apeshit, he'd actually have to care. Something he hasn't done for me in a long while."

I rolled my eyes. "Bullshit. The problem with King is he cares too damn much, for all of us. But you, you're a different case altogether. Just because you two aren't fucking anymore doesn't mean he doesn't still hold you in the highest of regards. No one would ever be good enough for you, according to him, especially not me."

Okay, where the hell had *that* all come from?

Shep sat there for a second, no doubt trying to process the insane shit that had just flown out of my mouth. But when it was no clearer to him why I was talking as though we were a couple hiding from our boss, instead of a casual fuck, he just…moved on.

Thank God.

"Let's focus on the actual problem at hand, okay?"

Fine by me. "Okay, let's."

"I think you should cancel your upcoming appearance until we touch base with Alessio and see if any other correspondence made it back to them."

"In other words, find out if this fucker is merely threatening me, or if the rest of our brothers are currently wondering which one of us is coming out on top."

Shep arched a brow. "Be serious."

"You don't think they'd wonder?"

"I mean about the threat, Theo. You need to cancel the soccer game."

"No."

"There will be a stadium full of people there—"

"And I'll have you to protect me."

Shep's jaw clenched and began to twitch. "There's only so much I can do."

"Good thing I'm not a wilting flower, then."

Shep rubbed at his brow as though he was getting a headache—which he probably was.

"Can I have my phone back?"

He sighed and handed it over, and I glanced down to check the last text that had come through—the one that had caught Shep's attention before I could look at it—and sucked in a breath.

The first photo that had been sent was a fun kiss to Shep's neck, an unexpected, impulsive move that had caught him off guard. But this second one was somehow even more intimate than the first. Not because we were touching—there was no physical contact in this shot. But my resident stalker had caught a moment where Shep and I were standing facing one another, me looking up at him and laughing at something he'd said, and Shep's eyes were twinkling with a joy that had been long absent.

There was no faking that kind of enjoyment in one another. That kind of chemistry. No way to brush off the emotions on both our faces, and had a

tabloid editor or one of our brothers seen it, they would've known in an instant something was going on.

We looked like a…couple. A very happy couple.

Putain.

"How long until we land?" I said, suddenly needing to get up and away from the man next to me.

"Three hours."

"Good." I unbuckled my belt and got to my feet. "That's just enough time for another nap."

"Seriously?" Shep said as I stepped past him and headed toward the back of the plane. "You're going to sleep now?"

I glanced back over my shoulder. "*Oui*, unless you want to join me."

Shep let his eyes trail down over me, and then, just as I'd suspected, he shook his head. "I don't think so."

There was nothing like a cold, hard reality check to remind you that shit was getting out of control, and this thing between us had ignited into something neither of us had expected or knew what to do with.

So for now I'd go and take my nap…alone.

OceanofPDF.com

26

SHEP

THE CROWD ROARED as the Swansea City team scored their first goal of the night, the majority of those packed into the stadium pulling for the home team. Theo shook his head where he stood in the executive box with the team owners from both sides, but he really couldn't be too disappointed, considering AS Monaco had taken the lead early on and never relinquished it. There wasn't much time left on the clock, and from the little I knew about football—or soccer, as we called it in the States—it seemed impossible for the home team to score enough goals to come through victorious.

Not that I'd been watching much of the game. Theo had my full attention, and after the messages he'd received on the plane, I wasn't taking any chances. He, on the other hand, *only* took chances, because if it were up to me, we wouldn't even be here. There were too many people, too many ways someone could get to him before I could, and that had me so tense I could've cracked steel in my fist.

Who the fuck had the audacity to think they could threaten him and get away with it? I was in those photos too, yet whoever this was hadn't reached out to me directly. The fact that King hadn't brought it up meant he hadn't been sent those pictures—yet—but I wasn't stupid. The threat hung over our heads, which meant Theo and I were on borrowed time, unless we could catch the motherfucker.

A sudden move out of the corner of my eye had me jerking in that direction, but it was only someone in the crowd jumping up after a kid

spilled an entire drink in their lap. I turned my attention back to Theo, who was laughing and nodding as the man on his left pointed out something on the field.

God, how much longer did we have to be here? It felt like there was a ticking time bomb, and I was ready to get us both somewhere safe, somewhere we were not surrounded by tens of thousands of people. Theo had done his duty, supported his country's team and made an appearance, so did he really have to stay for the whole game?

A collective groan reverberated throughout the stadium as a Swansea player missed the goal, and with the time running out, many around me were starting to pack up and leave, not wanting to see their team get annihilated.

That was good enough for me, and I quickly got to my feet. Theo saw me stand, our eyes locking across the distance between us, and he must've seen how on edge I was, because he nodded and began to say his goodbyes to the men beside him.

No one bothered looking my way as I passed, and that had a lot to do with the way I'd temporarily darkened my facial hair and kept things casual in a ball cap and Swansea City jersey. Theo had practically rioted when I put it on, but I'd managed to convince him that I'd stand out more wearing the guest team's jersey, and that was the last thing we needed. He'd backed down, but only after I promised him he could take it off later.

A wall of security walked him through the building, so I stuck to the back of the pack, and as we reached the exit, a sea of cars greeted us. The valet team were in a frenzy of activity that seemed disorganized at best. Several of the security team headed off in different directions to find out what was going on, but I wasn't going to let Theo stand here like a sitting duck while they figured it the fuck out.

I glanced at the tracker I'd put on the private car that had brought us to the stadium, and it was somehow still stuck on the far side of the lot.

Shit, it would take longer for it to get to us than it would for us to walk to it.

Fuck it.

I moved in beside Theo and flashed the tracker's position at him. He rolled his eyes.

"It'd be quicker to hike there," he said.

"My thoughts exactly."

He looked at me, but I continued to stay vigilant, scanning everyone around us as if they were a direct threat.

“Come on, then,” he said, knocking my shoulder with his and then turning around to dismiss the rest of the security team. “My bodyguard will take it from here. Thank you for your help today, gentlemen.”

I didn’t waste time leading him out of there, done with dealing with people for the day. I wasn’t used to having to be in bodyguard mode all the time, even though I always stayed aware of my surroundings when I was public facing, but this shit was exhausting. I wasn’t going anywhere else tonight except for our suite, and Theo was just gonna have to suck it up and enjoy room service.

“Oh, we’re running now, are we?” he said, keeping pace beside me.

“I’m not running.”

“Could’ve fooled me.” He pulled at his tie, loosening it. “Jesus, slow down. No one’s chasing us.”

“I’m just ready to get out of here, that’s all.”

“For someone who’s known for being in the public eye, you sure as fuck don’t like it all that much.”

“Excuse me if I don’t find watching out for your friendly stalker my idea of a good time.”

We rounded the corner, and when his car finally came into view, I nearly cheered. Freedom was a mere block away.

“I mean, can you blame them?” Theo continued. “I *am* pretty interesting. Good looking, too.”

I glanced over to see his smug smile, and shook my head. “Not to mention stubborn, arrogant, and self-involved.”

“That’s not true. Take now, for instance.” He moved in close enough that our arms brushed. “I’m not thinking about myself at all, rather, how quickly I can get you back to the hotel and out of that horrible jersey.”

“Which, in turn, will benefit you.”

“Well, don’t you think highly of your—”

BOOM!

An explosion strong enough that it threw the two of us back several feet detonated up ahead, where Theo’s car had been idling. The force shook the entire block and blew out the windows of buildings close by.

Screaming bystanders ran in any and all directions as flames licked up into the clear blue sky, and I immediately turned to where Theo had been

standing beside me, seeing him laid out flat on the sidewalk.

I reached out to grab his arm, then rolled to my side to check he was okay, that he was alive. The second I made contact, I heard a low groan, and he shifted to sit up, a cut on his forehead dripping blood down his temple.

“What the fuck was that?” he said, blinking through the swirls of dust and debris, trying to gather his bearings.

I, on the other hand, was busy getting to my feet now that I knew he was safe, more than aware of what the fuck that had been. Someone had planted a bomb in Theo’s car. Some motherfucker had just made an attempt on his life.

“Did they just blow up my *car*?” Theo asked as he got to his feet. When he took several steps forward to get a better look, I grabbed hold of his arm, halting him.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m trying to see who the *fuck* just tried to kill me.” Theo yanked his arm free and turned back to the fireball in front of us. A couple of unlucky people lay moaning in the street, but everyone else had scattered, which was exactly what I wanted the fuck to do.

But Theo seemed to have other ideas.

“Theo,” I growled as he continued toward what was left of the car. I could hear sirens in the distance, already coming for the casualties, and the last thing I needed was his being whisked off to some local hospital when someone was out here trying to off him. I needed to get him out of here and back to the hotel, where I could check him out and make sure he didn’t have any other injuries.

Though, judging by his determination to get closer to what was almost his—and my—very own cremation, I was starting to think he had sustained more damage to his head than he was letting on.

A flash of movement caught my attention just beyond the flames at the same time it did Theo’s, someone running from the scene. Before I could tell Theo we needed to get the fuck out of there, he took after the person, leaving me cursing up a storm behind him.

What the fuck?

It was obvious whoever had just bolted wasn’t injured in any way. But they also weren’t leaving the scene like some traumatized victim, either. Was this the person sending the emails? The texts? The videos? Was this them making good on their threat to kill Theo?

They were hightailing it out of there like they were. Like someone might find them. Find them and make them pay.

Unfortunately for them, they were right.

Theo was on their ass, the impact of the explosion clearly not having had any adverse affect on his motor skills. It was moments like this that I was reminded of just how deceptive the Prince of Monaco could be.

In public, as the face of the Monaco royal family, he was all polite, suave sophistication. But when he was presented with a challenge, when he was hunting down a potential threat—that fucker was a merciless hunter with rockets in his goddamn feet.

He'd taken off at a pace I couldn't keep up with, he was just that fast. Where I was more conscious of our surroundings, Theo zeroed in on his target like the predator I knew he could turn into on a dime.

Fuck, this was the last thing we needed, Theo's going rogue and chasing down this wannabe assassin. If anything, I wanted to catch the asshole and bring him to King. After I punched the fuckwad in the face a few times, of course, and found out what his deal with Theo was.

But the truth of the matter was, if Theo got to him first…

I rounded the side alley I'd just seen Theo bolt down and spotted him just before he launched himself at the fleeing man. He crash-tackled the guy from behind, plowing him into the side of the brick building with the strength of a man twice his size. But that's what was so surprising about Theo: he was muscle on muscle, and so quick you rarely saw him coming.

It seemed this guy was ready for the fight, though. He'd brought his knife—but that was his third mistake of the night. His first had been letting Theo live. His second had been letting Theo see him.

"You really don't want to do that," Theo warned as the dumbass lunged forward, swiping the knife through the air. I didn't recognize the man's face at all, his features nondescript and able to blend in with a crowd easily. Something about him didn't seem like a criminal mastermind, more like a gun for hire. I moved in from the other side, caging him in so his back was against the wall.

"Who do you work for?" I said, my gun trained on his chest.

He spat in my direction and tried to use that as a distraction to throw his knife at me. My reflexes were sharp, and I moved fast enough that the blade only grazed the sleeve of my jacket instead of nailing me in the arm.

That fucker. He'd just made mistake number four. As I started toward him, keeping my aim steady, Theo exploded with rage, tackling his ass to the ground. His fists connected with the guy's face with blow after blow, and he was only seconds away from knocking the man unconscious or worse if I didn't stop him.

"Theo, stop," I said, and when he didn't let up, I crouched down to meet him at eye level. "Ask him who he works for."

Theo drew his fist back. "Who the fuck do you work for?"

The man only smiled, blood coating his teeth and dripping down the sides of his mouth. "Someone smarter than you."

Theo snorted and grabbed hold of the guy's shirt, lifting him up off the ground. "If that were true, I'd be the one getting beat to shit, wouldn't I? So why don't you continue being a pathetic fuck and tell me why you were trying to kill me, and I'll think about letting you go with your head still attached."

The man opened his mouth, like maybe, just maybe, he'd give up the goods, but when he spat in Theo's face instead, my stomach dropped.

I knew what was coming next, and as quick as I was, I wouldn't be able to stop Theo in time.

He grabbed hold of the man's head and, before I could tell him not to, snapped his neck. The assassin went limp instantly, dropping to the ground with a thud.

"Fuck." I lowered the gun and groaned as Theo wiped his bloody knuckles off on the man's shirt. At least most of it wasn't his.

"Smarter than me," he muttered, shaking his head. "Doesn't look like it, does it, motherfucker?"

"You really couldn't wait to get some answers? Seriously, Theo. Not to mention *we're in the middle of a fucking alley with a dead body.*"

He rose to his feet, the blood from the cut on his forehead smeared down his face and the rage in his eyes only somewhat dimmed by the justice he'd just served. "Well," he said, and kicked at the corpse, "guess we'd better fucking move it, then."

OceanofPDF.com

27

THEO

"FUCK THIS SHIT," I fumed as we slammed into our hotel suite after somehow managing to dodge the influx of cops and ambulances that had descended on and around the stadium.

Today had been a clusterfuck of epic proportions, but one of the perks of having lived a life cloaked in secrecy was that our missions with Libertine had taught Shep and I to blend in or, at times, vanish altogether.

Something that had come in handy, since I'd just offed my attempted assassin.

"I'm getting really sick and tired of this motherfucker," I continued as I stormed into the massive en suite and pulled the tails of my shirt from my pants. "First he sends some bullshit AI video to all of you, trying to make me look like a traitor, then he's snapping photos of us like some dick-stroking creep, and now this. Some botched attempt at blowing me up?"

I glanced in the mirror to see Shep leaning against the doorjamb as though it would fall down without him. His wig was hanging over his shoulders from under a ball cap, and the fake contacts masking his ice-blue eyes were trained on me as though I was about to fly off the handle.

So I was a little worked up. That tended to happen when someone was trying to kill me.

"You got a problem?" I snapped when Mr. Stoic continued to stare me down.

"Other than the fact I just had to call and have a body removed? Nope." Shep pushed off the door and turned to walk back out to the living quarters.

“Just another day in lovely Cardiff.”

Smug fuck. How would he like to be in my position? No one believing him. A babysitter watching his every move. Someone out for his blood.

“You know what?” I called out as I tore my shirt off, following him to the door. “Fuck you.”

Shep stopped in the middle of the room and turned. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” Just as I could hear myself, and while I knew I should shut up, the adrenaline of the day had my mouth in overdrive. “I don’t need your sanctimonious judgment. Hell, I don’t even need your twenty-four-seven protection. All I need is to be left the fuck alone.”

I spun on my heel, about to make a truly epic exit by storming away and slamming the en suite door, but Shep grabbed my wrist and spun me back to face him.

“So you can what? Murder your way through all of Europe? I don’t think so.”

“It was him or me. Sorry if you don’t like the way things turned out.”

“Don’t be such a drama queen. There are ways to neutralize without pulverizing. We could’ve taken him somewhere, questioned him.”

“Oh yeah?” I sneered. “You don’t think the concierge might’ve had a few questions for me if we’d dragged a bloodied, lifeless body through the front lobby?”

“I don’t mean *here*.”

“Then where, genius? We had to think fast, move quick. Sorry if I didn’t take the time to map out a good place to take a man to torture him.”

I yanked my arm from Shep and headed back to the bathroom, slamming the door behind me. *Fucking know-it-all.* Nothing infuriated me more than being treated like a hothead. Especially when it came to matters like this. I wasn’t stupid. It wasn’t like I’d just said, *Fuck it,* and killed the guy.

I’d asked questions, and he’d decided not to answer. That wasn’t on me. But to act like I didn’t *want* to get to the bottom of this, like I wasn’t just as invested in finding out who was making my life a living hell, was downright insulting.

The cut above my eye was throbbing like a bitch. I inspected the gash, the dried blood indicating it wasn’t too bad, all things considered. But it was going to leave a nasty bruise all the same.

Putain. That was just what I needed when I was supposed to be attending several more events in the following weeks. A reminder of the explosion and that I was there. The press would have a field day. The story would never die.

Kind of like me.

I turned on the tap and splashed several handfuls of water over my face, the shock of the cold temperature enough to jolt me out of my red-hot rage as the door was flung open and I spun around to see Shep striding toward me.

Gone was the stupid hat and hair and the contacts that hid his true identity. In their place was the ice-cold fury of King's second-in-command. Shep's lips were pulled into a tight line, his fists balled at his sides, and he crowded me back into the sink and took hold of my jaw.

"You done with your pity party for one? Or do you need a few more minutes to lick your wounds?"

I tried to pull my head away, only to have him yank it back to face him.

"Because we have a problem, and I need your fucking head in the game."

"It's always in the game."

"Could've fooled me."

"Are we gonna do this all night? Because I could use a shower." I leaned in and sniffed him. "So could you."

Shep roughly pulled his hand away from my chin but didn't back up an inch. "We've got bigger issues than a fucking shower, Theo. It's time. You know it, and I know it."

I ground my molars as we stared each other down, and while I knew exactly what it was he wanted, there was no way it could happen.

"I can't do that," I said.

"Too bad."

"Too bad, my ass. I have obligations to put on a goddamn happy front while Jean's gone, and I can't step away from that. Not to mention, how can we catch this asshole if we're hiding?"

"That's not your problem anymore. We're going off the radar whether you like it or not."

"We?"

"Yes, we. I'm not dropping you off somewhere so you can get antsy and try to take things into your own hands."

I narrowed my eyes as I pushed off the counter. “Someone tried to *kill* me today. I think I deserve to be the one who makes them pay.”

“No one’s saying otherwise.”

“But you want us to go hide and let the others take care of it. Like fucking pussies—”

Shep shoved me so hard, my back slammed into the door. Every muscle in my body protested, already aching from my being thrown on the ground earlier.

“Keeping your stubborn ass safe is the priority. Today only proved that this thing has gotten bigger than you and I can handle alone, and there’s no way I’m letting you do another public event until this guy’s six feet under. You got me?”

Damn, a pissed off and in charge Shep was really fucking hot, and I couldn’t help but crack a smile. “Now, *that* we’re on the same page about. Well, the six-feet-under part, anyway.”

“*All* of it. I’m not asking you. I’m telling you. And if you want to defy me, I’ll pull rank and make you.”

“Oh? How do you plan to make me? Please go into great detail, and don’t leave anything out, especially the salacious bits.”

“I’m not fucking around, Theo.” Shep’s hand on my chest moved then, sliding up to my throat to hold me against the door. Not enough to cut off my breath, but just a warning, a threat that he was serious. It wasn’t like I doubted his words; in fact, I knew them to be true.

“No, you’re not, which is unfortunate for my dick.” I wrapped my fingers around his wrist and tried to pull his hand off my neck, but his grip was unyielding. “Don’t you have a phone call to make?”

Shep’s eyes narrowed to slits. “Keep pushing, I dare you.”

“What? I’m sure King’s already seen the explosion all over the news. He’s probably blowing up both our phones.”

“Probably.”

“And you’re not running off to answer?”

“No.”

I could see the hundreds of thoughts in Shep’s mind flit across his face like a to-do list in the making. He wasn’t the man I was sleeping with right now, he was second-in-command of the Libertines, a man with incredible power and connections, and I couldn’t help but admire the way he took charge.

He did *that* well in the bedroom too, but even with my always-inappropriate behavior, I could tell now wasn't the time.

"All right," I said, holding my hands up to show I was relenting enough that I was willing to at least listen. "What's the plan?"

Shep dropped his hold on my neck. "Whatever royal obligations you have left until Jean returns, get out of them. Don't tell anyone a thing, not even Amaya."

"I can't tell what I don't know."

"Exactly."

I waited for him to give me a little more than that, but when he didn't, I pressed, "Care to give me a heads-up on the plan? I can keep a secret. *Obviously*."

"It's better if you don't know."

I followed him back into the living room of the suite, where he headed straight for his bag and began to dig through it.

"Don't call for the plane," he said, pulling out one of the burner phones he kept tucked away. "I'll take care of it."

"Okay…is there anything I *can* do?"

"Yes." Shep looked up and nodded at the mess of clothes I'd strewn all over the couches when deciding what to wear. "Pack."

OceanofPDF.com

28

SHEP

Location: Off the Fucking Grid

THANK GOD THEO trusted me enough to let me handle our move without asking any more questions. While he showered and packed, I made plans to get us the hell out of there.

We needed somewhere he wouldn't be tempted to run wild when he got bored, which was inevitable, considering this could take days or even weeks.

There were Libertine safe houses all over the world, and while I'd been to all of them, I had a feeling the one we were heading to wasn't on Theo's radar. I didn't tell him where it was, and he didn't ask, but the flight was long enough that I figured he had a good idea of the general vicinity once we landed.

As with any of our safe houses, we kept cars near the airport so we wouldn't leave a paper trail from renting one, nor would anyone working for a private car service know our whereabouts. It was as under the radar as we could get without removing our trackers, which only our brothers, specifically Alessio, had access to. And considering we trusted them with our lives, I refused to entertain the idea that we'd been infiltrated in that way.

Whoever was coming after Theo was close, but not *that* close.

"You know I'm not one to complain," he said from the passenger seat, side-eyeing me. "But Jesus Christ, are we there yet?"

I couldn’t blame him for asking. Every time I moved, a body part cracked from the long hours spent on the flight, and then we’d added several more on top of it driving out to the remote location. I was ready for a hot shower and to pass out, but there were still things to do and someone to contact once we arrived.

“Actually, yes. Should be coming up on it soon.”

Theo stretched his legs out as far as he could in front of him, but I could feel the waves of impatience rolling off him.

Or maybe they were mine.

“I thought the next time I was in Brazil it would be for the São Paulo Grand Prix,” he mused. “Oh, or the Rio Carnival. Now that’s a good time.”

“Sorry to disappoint, but I don’t think this trip will be quite as exciting as you’re used to.”

“I’m sure we can think of a few ways to spice things up.”

I saw him grin out of the corner of my eye, could hear the teasing in his tone, but I was too focused on looking out for the house to flirt back. We were deep in the jungle, no one and nothing around for miles.

As the house finally came into view, Theo let out a whistle. “Now *this* is better than the cabin I would’ve expected all the way out here. What’d you do, find the remotest place you could and stick a house here?”

“Yes.”

I shut off the engine and popped the trunk. As I stepped out onto the dirt driveway, I took a moment to stretch.

The house itself was an architectural masterpiece, designed by one of King’s good friends to accommodate the surrounding rainforest and the balmy climate. From the inside it seemed as though it was an open-air style of living, with glass walls that welcomed nature inside. From the outside, however, the walls were reflective, keeping it private and blending into its surroundings. And that was before the concrete walls came down.

We dumped all our belongings near the entry, and then I gave Theo a quick tour. The walls and ceilings were smooth, elevated concrete, and it was mostly an open-concept space that allowed for uninterrupted viewing until you reached the metal staircase that led upstairs.

The pool on the roof captured Theo’s interest the most, and I hoped that was enough to keep him occupied over the long days ahead.

I wasn’t counting on it, though.

“I like it,” he said as he inspected one of the bedrooms with a keen eye. “I’m surprised I haven’t been here before. Have you?”

I’d been here more than a few times; I’d overseen the construction.

“You could say that,” I said before heading back into the main room. I could feel the weariness in my bones starting to take over, like all the adrenaline I’d been running on the past twenty-four hours had drained out of my body.

I just had a call to make first.

I pulled out my laptop and set it up on one of the main tables, then connected to the secure network before finally making the call. The last thing I felt like doing right now was briefing King, but if past experience had told me anything, it was that the sooner I updated him, the happier we would all be. Especially when there were explosions and bodies involved.

I glanced over at the fully stocked bar cart pushed up against one of the walls and was almost tempted to stop the call, make a drink, then come back and redial. But that would just piss King off, and I really wanted to get this over with, with as minimal conflict as possible.

“Shep, I was wondering when I was going to hear from you.”

No, *Hello, how are you?* Just straight to the point. That was Tyrone Kingston. But he’d always been that way when it came to Libertine business—even when we were a couple.

“The flight to Brazil is long. We just arrived.”

King would know by now exactly where we were. The second news of the bombing hit, he would’ve had Alessio checking on our trackers. But he was also smart enough to know I’d move Theo as soon as I was able. Out of the public eye. Out of harm’s way. That was why I was here, what he’d sent me for, and the fact he trusted me enough to do that without blowing up my phone spoke volumes.

“I trust everything there is in order?”

I glanced around the safe house, knowing that the floor-to-ceiling windows were replaced at the touch of a button by thick concrete walls that could keep out just about anything.

“Seems to be. I’ll be doing a full check of the systems once we’re done here. But so far, everything seems to be in working order.”

“Good. Now, fill me in. Leave nothing out.”

I gave King an in-depth rundown of everything that had happened back in Cardiff, from the game, to the explosion, to the aftermath when Theo and

I had run down his wannabe assassin. There was no way around telling him about Theo's decision to remove that particular threat from the chessboard, since King would've gotten word that the cleanup crew had been called in.

But there was *one* piece of information I might have left out: the texts sent to Theo on the way *to* Cardiff. I didn't see any need to bring them up, not now, especially if King hadn't received them. It was clear the person behind these threats was trying to stoke conflict in our ranks, and I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction.

Plus, it wasn't like they meant anything. They were just Theo being Theo, trying to antagonize me.

"So what exactly were you doing when Theo was taking out our only potential link to whoever is doing this?"

I'd known this question was coming, but it rankled just the same. "I was standing right beside him."

"And you just let him kill this guy?"

My jaw locked as I bit back my automatic smartass retort. But I couldn't say I wouldn't be asking the same thing if I were in his position.

"No. I made him stop and ask a few questions first."

"Oh, well, that makes it all right, then," King said, unamused.

"Look, he wasn't talking. We didn't have much time to decide what to do, and in the end—"

"Theo took matters into his own hands," he grumbled. "Seems he's been doing that a lot lately."

"If you're referring Istanbul, I thought we'd come to the decision that it wasn't him."

"We are ninety-nine point-nine percent sure, but until that last point-one is cleared up, nothing is off the table. Theo is a wild card, always has been. Don't act like you don't know it."

"He might be wild, but he's not reckless. I just don't think he'd ever put us at risk that way."

"I don't either. Trust me, I don't want to believe he's capable of what these videos and messages are saying, but I also can't take any chances. Not when it puts all of us at risk. I don't like this any more than you, Shep."

He'd like it even less if he'd seen the most recent messages to Theo, the images that showed *me* in a compromising position. Then King would have more than just Theo to worry about—he'd worry I was too close, or worse, thinking with my dick.

“Has Alessio turned up anything new?” I asked, wanting to change the subject ASAP.

“It’s looking more and more like it’s coming from in house.”

Fuck. We’d had our suspicions, but with Alessio now backing them up, it made this even more fucked up. Someone was trying to mess with our organization. Someone from the inside. Not a brother, but a member of the wider Libertines. That meant they knew our secrets. Could expose them…

“He’s closing in on them, but it’s clear they have knowledge the general public would not. They’ve known where you’re at and what you’re going to do next, so I think it’s smart for you to stay off grid.”

I agreed. I couldn’t remember the last time, if ever, we’d faced a threat like this from the outside, let alone the inside. But it was obvious someone had an issue not only with Theo but all of us, and we needed to keep shit as quiet as possible from here on out.

“So we’ll hunker down here until told otherwise?”

“That’s the plan. Only Alessio and myself know where you’re at, so keep all technology off and check in in a few days.”

“Will do.”

“Okay. Keep safe, and Shep?”

“Yeah?”

“Go get some sleep. You look like hell.”

OceanofPDF.com

29

THEO

A LIGHT HUMMING sound filtered through my dreamless sleep. I couldn't place what it was, but it didn't sound immediately dangerous, so I didn't bother opening my eyes. It wasn't until heat crept up my body and a bright light stung behind my eyelids that I got curious.

The concrete walls that Shep had lowered while we slept were rising back up to the ceiling, letting in the sun, and he stood in the doorway of my room, arms crossed over his chest as he watched me. I'd never seen him so casual before, in a tank top and cargo shorts.

"Now that's different," I said, my voice coming out a bit rough and scratchy as I stretched my arms up over my head. "You look ready to work up a sweat."

"That's because I am." His gaze drifted over me slowly as he reached for a second pair of shorts—*my* shorts—and tossed them at me. "And so are you."

"I'm not sure why that would require I put *on* clothes, but if you want a workout, I'm more than happy to accommodate you."

I kicked the sheets down my body, revealing my fully aroused cock, and reveled in how Shep's eyes took the same path.

"Take off your clothes and come to bed. I was too tired last night to take advantage of you, but I'm more than willing now."

Shep snorted and tossed a black tank top and hoodie on top of my shorts. "Well, thank you for your sacrifice, but I need to get out, stretch my

legs. I don’t know how long we’re going to be here, and I want to get my bearings.”

“I thought you said you’ve been here before?”

“I have been. But that was a long time ago.”

“And now you want to do a perimeter check.”

“Something like that.”

My attention drifted past Shep to the lush jungle beyond. “Okay, how about you go do that, and when you’re finished, you know where to find me.”

He chuckled and shook his head. “I don’t think so. Until we know who and where this threat is coming from, you and I are going to be joined at the hip.”

“The hip?” My eyes dropped below the waist of his shorts. “I can think of a much more pleasurable way to be joined.”

“Get up,” Shep ordered me, and before I could point out that I already was, he turned on his heel and headed for the door. “If you’re not in the living room in the next two minutes, you’re not going to like what happens next.”

I wasn’t sure what it said about me that his threat was just as enticing as his body, but as he disappeared from the room I found myself climbing out of bed and pulling my clothes on. Though I was loathe to admit it, Shep was right—until we knew where the threat was coming from, we needed to stay vigilant. Just because I had him off grid in a house that had fortress-like walls, that didn’t mean I could let my guard down—even if the idea of being alone with Shep for the foreseeable future had an appeal unlike any other.

Not only were we cut off from civilization, we had also gone dark on all communications, in and out. Essentially, we were on our own until we checked in.

“Theo.” Shep’s voice echoed through the house to where I’d just finished pulling on my shorts. I tugged the tank top over my head and snatched up my hoodie, then headed down the hall.

“All right, keep your pants on. Oh wait,” I said as I came to a stop in the living room. “You already did that.”

Shep looked up from tying one of his hiking boots and gestured to the extra pair in front of him. “You’re going to want to put those on.”

I eyed the thick-tread boots. “Just how far are we going?”

“Just a few miles.”

“Then why can’t I just wear my usual workout shoes?”

Shep sat back in his seat. “Well, you can, but I would think you might want something more substantial between your feet and the wildlife out there.”

“Wildlife?”

“Insects, spiders, snakes.”

“*Oui*, I get it, and I think I’m just going to wait here for—”

“No. Put your boots on, Theo.”

I grumbled but took the couch opposite him, racking my brain for a way out of this. Surely there was a way to get Shep to leave me behind. But when he tossed me a pair of thick socks, I knew my time for coming up with said plan was running out.

“Maybe I could stay here and make some breakfast for us?”

“You? Cook?” Shep pushed to his feet and walked over to a backpack sitting on the table. “I think I’d rather walk through the jungle in flip-flops.”

“Oh, I see, you’re feeling funny today.”

Shep glanced over his shoulder at me with a grin. “Let’s just say I woke up refreshed. A good sleep will do that.”

“So would a good fuck—want to help me out?”

“Put your fucking boots on.” Shep chuckled and headed for the kitchen, and by the time he came back carrying several bottles of water, my boots were tied and I’d pulled a baseball cap on.

“Happy?” I spread my arms and made a slow circle.

“Ecstatic.” He zipped up the backpack and put it on, but it seemed to me he was missing the most important items for any hike.

As I headed to the weapons safe he’d shown me on our tour last night, he called out, “What do you think you’re doing?”

“You said snakes. Not a fan.” I tucked a sheathed knife into the back of my pants and went to shut the safe, then thought twice about what else we might encounter and grabbed one of the Glocks.

Shep snorted as I met him at the door. “Planning on shooting a snake? You killed a man with your bare hands.”

“Maybe I plan on shooting you for waking me up to hike through a jungle.”

He rolled his eyes and gestured for me to go first before locking up. “I seem to remember *you* forcing me to explore Japan. Made me eat fucking

octopus balls. Yet *now* you say you're not up for an adventure?"

"Hey, those balls were delicious."

"The second best I've ever had in my mouth."

He winked as he walked by me to lead the way, and my jaw hit the dirt-covered ground.

"I'm sorry," I said, blinking as I stood there staring after him until I realized I needed to catch up and not get lost out here. "Did I hallucinate that, or did you just insinuate that my balls are the best you've ever put in your mouth? Because I need to record this moment for posterity."

"Oh, you think I meant yours?"

"Are you fucking seri—" My words cut off as a teasing glint entered his eyes. "You asshole."

He began to laugh, a more relaxed sound than I'd heard from him in weeks. "You walked right into it."

A smartass retort was on the tip of my tongue, but then it hit me: an unwanted image of Shep with King flashing through my mind, and along with it, a seed of doubt that came with wondering if that was whom he meant. King.

Putain. Was that whom he meant?

No. I shook off the thought. Of course he wasn't talking about him. He wouldn't make a joke like that about King. Shep didn't usually joke, period, so this side of him was what I brought out of him. Right?

He cocked his head curiously at me as I grunted and batted a wayward limb out of my face. When it came back to slap me again, I whipped out my knife and cut the damn thing in half.

"See?" I said, slicing at a hanging vine in our path. "Told you this would come in handy."

"Right, for all the trees trying to attack you."

"Hey, this is a dangerous, unfamiliar place. If something comes at me and I react, it's not my fault."

"Well, I don't think anything we'll find out here is used to kneeling for royalty, so maybe give them the benefit of the doubt before you start putting bullets in everything."

That all sounded like a bunch of blah fuckin' blah except for the part about kneeling. "I couldn't even get you on your knees for me this morning. I don't have high hopes for the monkeys."

The deeper we hiked into the jungle, the hotter it got, to the point where I finally stripped off my hoodie and tied it around my waist. Almost immediately, the mosquitos began their attack, and the sound of my slapping them off one by one was all you could hear as we trekked farther into the middle of nowhere for what had to be miles.

"Theo, watch out for the—"

Too late. I stepped into about a foot of mud, and it squelched up the length of my boot. *Ugh.* I guess Shep had been right about one thing: my workout shoes would've been goners.

I lifted my boot up out of the mess and shook it off, wrinkling my nose in disgust. "*Merde*. This is barbaric. I wasn't made for…mud."

"Nah, I know you too well. You enjoy getting your hands dirty." Shep's gaze wandered down my chest, where I could feel the sweat from all the humidity soaking through my t-shirt. "Among other things."

I caught on to the fact he was flirting, but my annoyance at this little outing was starting to take over, and I snapped my teeth at him. "Careful, Shep. I bite."

"You say that like it's a threat."

"I didn't say *where* I'd bite."

He let out a low whistle and chuckled, continuing on into…wherever the hell we were. It all looked the same to me, tree after tree, all very lush and green, of course, but… Fuck me, was that a snake wrapped around one of the branches not far above us?

"Try to relax," Shep said, looking up at what had caught my eye. "It won't hurt you if you don't provoke it. I know that's a damn near impossible ask, but try."

I swallowed hard and wiped at the sweat on my brow. This was ridiculous. I wasn't scared of anything, and I wasn't about to let some boneless reptile make me tuck tail and run. I'd filet its ass first.

Letting out an exhale, I nodded and went to follow after Shep, only to see he'd moved in close, blocking my path.

"You good?" he asked, a slight frown marring his brow, like he was actually concerned for my wellbeing instead of giving me hell. His hand came to rest on my forearm, and that touch made my heart beat a little faster.

Maybe I was dehydrated.

“I’m great.” I took a step back, letting his arm fall away. “Well, great for schlepping it in the woods, which is like the bottom rung of great.”

“I ‘schlepped it’ in Osaka.”

“And that was a good time. You even admitted it.”

He arched a brow. “You trying to say you’re not having a good time?”

At that moment, the world’s largest spider dropped onto Shep’s shoulder, and I didn’t miss a beat, knocking the damn thing off before it could get its fangs in him. The man *was* fucking delicious, after all. I couldn’t blame it for wanting a bite.

The critter scampered off under some brush, and when Shep got a good look at his new friend, he shuddered.

“Exactly,” I said, smirking and body-checking him as I passed. “All I’m saying is, if this is your idea of a date, your seduction skills need work.”

OceanofPDF.com

30

SHEP

OKAY, THE SPIDER thing was pushing it, even for me, but it was what Theo said that had my attention.

A date? Did he think this was a *date*? Did he want it to be?

"You coming?" Theo looked over his shoulder, and my cock jerked at the picture he made: skin glistening, sweaty t-shirt clinging to his muscles—even the damn muddy boots had him looking really fucking good. I'd wanted to get him out for some fresh air and great views, but I had to admit I wasn't looking at anything but him now.

Something he caught on to when I didn't stop staring.

"Oh, I see." He walked back to where I stood, curled his finger into the front of my shorts, and pulled me toward him. "You're so impressed by my heroic actions, saving you from certain death, that you want to thank me with your dick. Right here, right now."

His smirk would've been insufferable on anyone else, but Theo wasn't just anyone. He was uncontained and confident and too fucking much, but somehow that was all part of his charm.

And it was winning me over.

"You think I planned this hike to get you all hot and bothered?"

Theo dipped his fingers into my pants, grazing them along my skin and making me forget we were standing in the middle of a fucking jungle.

"I was already hot and bothered this morning. You just wanted to see me sweat."

Those full lips were tempting, and as I leaned in to take just a little taste, my eyes caught on something up ahead that altered my plans. “Actually, I want to get you wet.”

“Fuck, consider it done,” he said, angling his head toward me, but I pulled back before he could kiss me.

“Look.” I pointed behind him at the waterfall peeking through the trees. “Care to go for a dip with me?”

“Uh—”

I didn’t wait for his answer before grabbing the hand he’d been trying to stick down my pants and tugging him along behind me.

“Wait, you’re serious?” Theo said. “Is that a good idea?”

“Is a waterfall ever a bad idea?”

He didn’t have an answer for that, and as we stopped along the edge of the crystal-blue water, it looked so inviting that I kicked my boots off.

Theo’s eyes darted around us, scanning everything as if danger was going to pop out any second, but when I pulled my shirt up over my head, he swallowed.

“Come on. It’s gonna feel great.” I folded my shirt and placed it on top of my boots, but Theo was still standing there with his arms crossed.

“You’ve, uh, done this before? Here?”

“Have I swum at the bottom of a waterfall? Yeah. Many times. I’ve jumped off them, too.” I waggled my brows and squinted up at the rocks above, figuring a rough estimate of its height in my head. “Wanna try?”

“Eh, I think I’m good right here.”

“Theo, don’t be a chickenshit.”

“You do know I’m still carrying the knife.”

I laughed and walked to the rock’s edge, where the water was deeper and darker, and then did a shallow dive. It was freezing, but it felt amazing after the heat and humidity soaking through my clothes after hiking awhile.

I broke through the surface to see Theo shaking his head at me, his boots still on, not looking at all like he was joining me.

“How do you know it’s safe? Aren’t there anacondas in there?” he said.

“Just mine.” I grinned, and when Theo groaned, I sent a splash of water his way. “You look like you’re about to stroke out from heat exhaustion, so will you just get in already? Unless you’re scared your crown will slip.”

“I’m not scared. I’m enjoying the view.”

“You could enjoy more than just the view…”

Theo's eyes turned heated at my offer, and then he cursed. "You're a pain in my ass."

"Good. Now you know how it feels."

I didn't know what he was muttering in French, but it sounded an awful lot like he was cursing me, cursing the jungle, and cursing the fact he couldn't help wanting to join me in the first place.

He lost the boots, the weapons, but not the shorts. As he slowly lowered himself in, he held up his middle finger at me.

I laughed and began a slow backstroke out to the middle of the water, doing my best to encourage Theo in past his waist.

"I'm going to make you pay for this," he grumbled, but the second he lowered himself into the water, he groaned at the immediate cool-down. The humidity out here was no joke.

"See, don't you feel better?"

Theo swam over to where I was treading water and slicked his hair back from his face. "This gloating side of you is really not attractive."

"Is that right?" I reached for his waist and drew him in close, then leaned in and said by his ear, "Well, this pouting, scared side of you is kind of adorable."

He pulled back to glare at me. "I'm not scared."

"No? So what was the holdup, then?"

"I was surveying the danger."

"Of the water?"

Theo relaxed into me again and wound his arms around my neck. "The water, the reptiles…the man."

That was interesting. "You think I'm dangerous?"

Something flickered in Theo's eyes as he thought over my question and I moved my hands down to cup his ass.

"I think you could be."

"In general?" I pushed, knowing I had zero right to. But I had him here, and he was feeling vulnerable. "Or to you?"

Theo threaded his fingers up through the wet strands at the nape of my neck, and just as he was about to answer me, his entire body stiffened.

"What was that?"

"What was—"

"*That*." He shoved out of my arms so hard I had no choice but to let him go. "What the fuck, Shep?"

“I don’t— Oh.” I started to laugh as something long and slippery brushed up against me. “It’s probably just an eel.”

Theo’s eyes widened. “*Just* an eel. Have you lost your mind?”

He turned so fast that a spray of water hit me in the face as he kicked toward the edge of the watering hole.

“It’s likely an American eel—they’re generally non-aggressive to humans.”

“Generally?” Theo shook his head as he slipped and slid his way up onto the rocks where he’d left his clothes. “Until one bites your dick off.”

I chuckled but followed, knowing this little respite was over for now. “At least you didn’t get an electric shock. Electric eels are known to swim in these freshwater lakes and rivers too.”

Theo’s hands froze as he glared down at me. “Are you fucking serious?”

I nodded as I climbed out of the water and reached for my shirt. “Relax, would you? Most eels prefer murky waters, and as you can see, this is crystal clear.”

Theo started cursing in French again, but this go around was much more biting in tone. If I had to guess, he was likely cursing my existence and wishing me straight to hell. But as he turned away from me and went to grab for his tank top, any other assurances I had for him vanished.

Instead, I grabbed his arm and stilled him.

Theo immediately went to wrench it free, but when I said, “I don’t mean to alarm you,” he froze.

“News flash, I *am* fucking alarmed.” He went to spin around and face me, but I halted him with a firm hand.

“Hold still,” I ground out, and studied Theo’s…new little friend.

“Shep?”

“Hmm?”

“What the fuck is going on?”

“You, ah”—I slowly bent down and reached around him for the knife he’d placed beside his clothes—“picked up a friend just now.”

“A friend?”

I straightened behind him, knife in hand, and Theo craned his head to look over his shoulder. When he caught sight of the fat, black, slimy sucker on his shoulder, he balked.

“Is that a… Is that a…”

“Leech?” I nodded, concentrating on its body as I worked out the best way to remove it from his skin. “Yeah, um, they don’t like when you stand still. Especially on the rocks here.”

“You think you could’ve fucking told me that before I put my clothes here. Before you *brought* me out here. *Mon Dieu.* Get it off me.”

“I’m trying,” I said, trying my best not to laugh. This wasn’t funny, really. Except it kind of was.

“Just pull it off.” Theo reached up to do just that.

“No!” I barked. “If you squeeze it or pull it, it might…” I trailed off, deciding it was probably best I didn’t tell him what it could do as a result of his doing that.

“It might what?” Theo demanded, and I shook my head, glaring him straight in the eye.

“Just stand still, would you? I need to slide the knife under its head and get its hooks out of you.”

“Putain, je vais te tuer,” Theo said, and when I frowned, he said, “I’m going to fucking kill you.”

“Okay, but do it after.” I slowly slid the knife under the body and down to where the leech was attached. Theo looked away just as I reached its suckers and flicked the fat, plump body to the ground.

Theo shuddered at the sight of it and jerked away from me. “Are there any others on my back?”

“Nope,” I said, biting on my lip to keep from laughing. Then I ran my eyes down to his shorts, just to fuck with him. “Not that I can *see*, anyway.”

All the color drained from Theo’s face as he pulled out the elastic waist of his shorts and gave his dick a thorough inspection.

“Want me to check your ass?”

“Fuck you, Winchester,” he bit out as he snatched the rest of his clothing and shook it vigorously. “Don’t think I’ll forget this.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” I said as I gave myself, and my clothes, a quick once-over. “Ready to check the rest of the perimeter?”

“If you think for one second I am going anywhere other than back to the house and away from anything that crawls, slithers, or bites, you’re out of your damn mind. And that, for the record includes *you*. Slimy, underhanded bastard.”

“Aw, come on,” I said, and finally lost the battle not to laugh. “Don’t be like that. I mean, I did just save you.”

“Non,” Theo said, and marched forward. “You saved yourself because if I were still holding that knife, you would be gutted right now.”

“Liar. You like me too much to gut me.”

Theo narrowed his eyes, but instead of responding, he spun on his heel and marched off into the jungle, where he proceeded to curse me out in French all the way home.

OceanofPDF.com

31

THEO

SEVERAL FANTASIES OF just how I'd torture Shep after this hike from hell flooded my mind one after the other as I trekked back to the house. Tormenting him with leeches on his own damn body was high on the list, but that wasn't enough.

First, he'd woken me up, and not with the orgasm I deserved, then he forced me out into the hottest place on the planet to, what, look at the wildlife? Having them violate my body was a step too far, and now Shep thought it was smart to follow after me chuckling the whole damn way?

If I didn't enjoy his cock so much, I'd have a good mind to rip it off his body and beat him with it.

The only smart thing the man had done all day was give me the code to enter the safe house, and the eye scanner did the rest. I kicked off the muddy boots, leaving them on the patio to rot, and then hightailed it to the shower.

There better not be one more fucking leech on my body, or I was going to lose my mind.

After turning the spray all the way to hot, I ripped off my clothes—which I'd be burning later—and gave myself an inspection in the mirror. When I didn't see any signs of those nasty little fuckers, I jumped into the shower, not caring at all that it scalded my skin. If there were any leeches hiding, they were dead now.

I shuddered just thinking about them, and immediately grabbed the soap and began to scrub my body raw. If that had been Shep's idea of a good

time, he was never allowed to plan anything for us ever again.

Through the shower glass, I saw the door open. When Shep stepped inside, I shook my head.

“Oh no you don’t,” I said. “Go get your own shower—this one’s taken.”

“Aw, don’t be like that.” He didn’t pay any attention to my warning, peeling off his clothes instead and adding them to the pile. The glass distorted his image, but it was still a fucking hot one. Not that I was going to let that distract me from my irritation.

He opened the shower door to my glare, and the bastard grinned. *Grinned*. Like I wouldn’t take the showerhead off and knock him unconscious with it.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” I said when he went to step inside. “I’m feeling feral right now. I can’t promise you’ll leave this shower if you enter it.”

“Feral? Me too.” He held up his hands and walked his naked ass into my space. “I come in peace.”

“I don’t know that word.” I scrubbed at my scalp, feeling for anything that shouldn’t be there and hoping like hell I wouldn’t find anything.

“Bend over and I’ll show you,” he said. “Or don’t you want me to check in all the hidden places?”

There was a challenge in those blue eyes, along with misplaced arousal, because there was nothing at all sexy about this moment.

Although my dick wasn’t necessarily getting the message, because it got interested the second Shep stepped into the shower. *Fucking traitor.*

He took the bar of soap from me and began to lather up his hands, and I stayed under the spray, not giving him an inch.

“Come on, Theo,” he said, dropping his voice to that sexy, persuasive tone I hadn’t been able to resist—so far. “I’ll be thorough…”

I sniffed and kicked my chin up, not ready to give in, wanting to make Shep pay for our disastrous adventure. But I really *did* want him to check that I hadn’t missed anywhere, and if he wanted to make it up to me, then I guessed I could at least get an orgasm out of the deal.

“Well,” I said, turning around so the spray hit my chest, “I suppose it is the *least* you could do.”

Shep moved in behind me, sliding his soapy hands down my ass, his lips against my ear. “Bend over for me and I’ll make it up to you.”

Now that was more like it. I still didn’t hear a “sorry,” but Shep would be too proud to admit his idea of a good time was a terrible one.

I braced myself on the wall, bending enough to give him access. He spread my cheeks, trailing his fingers down between them, and my traitorous body shivered, giving me away.

He didn’t get on his knees, but stayed close enough that I could feel his warmth as he did a very thorough inspection of my ass, those talented fingers teasing in just the right spot to have my resolve waning. But just a little.

I closed my eyes and waited for him to dive in deeper, to feel his cock tease my hole before he took me, but then the image of a leech hiding beneath his balls entered my mind, and I spun around.

Shep wasn’t expecting me to do that, because he blinked in surprise but didn’t back up a step.

“We have a problem,” I said, pushing against his chest with my finger. “How do I know you aren’t hiding any little bastards? We never checked you.”

Shep ran the soap through his hands and smirked. “Is this your way of feeling me up, then?”

“Hardly. I just don’t want your dick anywhere near my ass if you haven’t thoroughly checked yourself.”

“Oh, I see. Did you want to do the honors, then?” He held the bar out to me, and I snatched it from him.

I lathered up my hands, my eyes trailing down his rock-hard chest and abs to the stiff dick pointing straight out at me. It wasn’t fair that he had such a gorgeous cock, but it was my good fortune. Especially now, since I planned to make good use of it.

Like I’d said, it was the *least* he could do.

I placed the soap back in the alcove, and the second I wrapped my fingers around him, Shep sucked in a breath and dropped his head back.

I wanted to stay angry, really I did, and maybe if I hadn’t been facing him…

Maybe if I couldn’t see, feel or smell him, I would’ve been able to stay strong.

But it turned out I was as weak as the millions of other people who wanted to get their hands on America’s son. The main difference? I *had* my

hands on him, and I'd be damned if I let him get away without getting the orgasm I deserved.

I slid my fist up Shep's rigid length, marveling over the heat of his skin, and once I was satisfied there was nothing sucking the blood from his body, I put my lips to his throat.

"You better make this up to me, Winchester."

Shep raised his head then took my face in his hands and lowered his lips until they were mere inches from mine.

"Fucking count on it."

Shep took my lips in a crushing kiss. He thrust his tongue in, no gentle tease, but full, deep penetration as he walked me back to the tiled wall and pinned me there. I hiked one of my legs up his thigh to his hip and shoved my dick through his fist. Shep ripped his mouth off mine and cursed.

Then he planted a hand on the wall by my head, and those usually ice-blue eyes turned molten.

"That's it," he said, his voice so low I barely made it out over the spray of the shower. "Let me *serve* you, Your Serene Highness."

He punctuated his words with a firm pull of my cock, making my eyes roll to the back of my head. Then he began to kiss along my jaw to my ear.

"Fucking gorgeous," he said, more to himself than to me, but hearing it only made me want him even more.

I reached for his arms, digging my fingers into his biceps as I starting to thrust in and out of his closed fist, and when he flicked his tongue over my lobe, I turned my head to get another taste of him.

This time around, though, I was the one pushing past his lips. My tongue sweeping inside and finding his to tangle with as he began to rock against me, his thick cock dripping sticky pre-cum on my thigh.

And that just wouldn't do.

I wanted the same contact with our bodies as we had with our tongues—friction, stroking, rubbing—and with that thought in mind, I reached down and aligned his erection with mine.

Understanding exactly what I wanted, Shep loosened his grip to take hold of the both of us, and when his erection brushed up against mine, I groaned and let my head fall back against the wall.

"Now," I told him with a smirk, "you may serve me."

Shep bit into my lower lip. "It would be my pleasure, Your Serene Highness."

They were the last words out of his mouth before he stroked his slippery palm up both our lengths.

The feeling was exquisite, toe curling, and all I could do was hang on as Shep worked the two of us under the hot spray, destroying all thoughts other than how hard and fast I could come all over him.

"*Putain,*" I gasped, wrenching my mouth from his so I could look at what he was doing.

If I'd thought feeling it was epic, seeing his dick rub up and down against mine nearly made my knees buckle.

I was in deep fucking trouble here. Shep was supposed to have been a one-off, a quick, mindless fuck in Monaco to take my mind off the fact I'd been at my irritating brother's wedding. Now here we were, weeks later, and still ending up in each other's arms.

Part of me wanted to say it was nothing, that we were just hard up, scratching an itch that both of us happened to have. But the truth was that I couldn't remember the last time I'd had an itch for the same person several times over.

The fact it was one of my Libertine brothers, the bossman's *ex*, should have been enough to have me running in the opposite direction. Yet here I was, tangled around Shep's body tighter than the damn vines covering this hellscape jungle, and wondering how the fuck I was ever going to *un*tangle myself.

That was a question for another time, though. Right now, I was going to concentrate on—

"*Mon Dieu*, Shep…" I moaned as he scraped his teeth down the side of my neck and sucked at the tight skin where it met my shoulder.

He hummed against my wet skin as I tightened my leg around his ass and pulled him as hard against me as I could possibly get him.

"I'm going to come."

"I sure fucking hope so," he growled, and flicked his tongue over the bite mark he'd just left. "'Cause I'm not gonna last much longer."

Just hearing that Shep was only seconds away from losing it himself, I leaned forward and bit down on his lip. "Come all over me," I demanded, and Shep grinned.

"Is that a royal command?"

"*Oui,*" I said as his fingers flexed. "And you owe me."

I tugged on his lip then let it go to lean back on the wall.

“Make a mess of me, Shep. A royal fucking mess.”

His eyes trailed down my body, then back up to my face, as his arm began to pump the both of us harder and faster. The slippery soap mixed with both our pre-cum as I thrust forward, rubbing my dick against him in an erotic slide that was one of the sexiest moments of my life.

Shep lowered his head until his lips were in the crook of my neck, and as he ground against me, I wrapped my arms and leg around him to keep him as close as I could, wanting to feel the moment he let go, wanting to feel the hot rush of his cum as it made a mess of me.

I could feel his hot breath on my skin as he rushed toward the finish line, and when his body stiffened, my cock jerked against his and our shouts echoed off the shower walls. Our climax hit at the same time and we made a mess of each other.

It was as close to perfection as I could have imagined.

But that still didn’t mean I’d forgiven him for the fucking leeches.

OceanofPDF.com

32

SHEP

THE FLAMES CRACKLED in the fire pit as I placed a grate over them, along with the meat skewers I'd prepared earlier. Theo had watched from his perch on the counter, wine in hand, no offer to help on his tongue, which was his way of continuing to get me back for our hike earlier.

Not that he'd be much help anyway, considering he'd never been in a kitchen, much less knew his way around one. Sure, he knew how to wield a knife, but I wouldn't trust him not to absolutely gut the steak into tiny pieces, so it was better to ply him with alcohol and send him on his way.

"Don't let this compliment go to your head, but this is kind of impressive," Theo said, topping off our glasses of cabernet. He settled back into the Adirondack chair beside mine and stretched out his legs. "I wouldn't have guessed you liked to get your hands dirty—in *all* the ways—but I'm learning a lot about you lately."

"I can't tell if I should be flattered or offended."

"Don't pretend you didn't grow up with the same silver spoon in your mouth as I did. The White House has, what, at least ten chefs?"

"Five. But that was a long time ago." I moved a couple of the skewers around to hit the higher flames and then reached for my wine. I was still a glass or two behind Theo and not yet feeling the nice buzz he seemed to have, but I was definitely more relaxed than I'd been in weeks. Part of me was still keeping an eye out just in case, but the likelihood of anyone finding us out here was almost zero, and I tried to keep that in mind as I took a long sip of my drink.

Theo shifted toward me, and I couldn’t help but notice that he hadn’t shaved in a few days, which only accentuated how full his lips were. They were just as much of a menace as the man himself. “So where’d you learn to do all this, then? Was there a survival course I missed when I joined?”

“There was. Cooking 101: How not to burn water.”

“And who was in charge of that one? Surely not King.”

It was an offhand comment, a joke, but just hearing King’s name, in this setting, was jarring, and I shifted my focus back to the food, making sure it didn’t burn.

Out of the corner of my eye, Theo’s mouth snapped shut, like he regretted speaking King’s name into existence. But then, like he couldn’t help himself, he said, “Did you come here with him?”

I looked back at him, and it was honest curiosity I saw in his expression. It made me wonder why he asked. Theo didn’t ask personal questions about King, or me and King, but it was obviously on his mind.

“Would that bother you?”

“No,” he said, a little too quickly, but then shrugged. “He’s your past. We all have one.”

“So it doesn’t bother you that King is my past?”

He swirled his wine. “I’d be lying if I said I didn’t wonder how you feel about it.”

“About King?”

“He seems to be a bit of a sore spot. Is it because you still have feelings for him? Or because he moved on? You never talk about it, and I remember how hard you took the breakup.”

I bristled at that, but he wasn’t wrong. And Theo had been there. All of my brothers had been. It wasn’t like this was a secret relationship to anyone in our inner circle. To the rest of the world? Yes. And that was the way King had wanted it.

“It’s”—I searched for the word, but nothing sounded right—“complicated.”

Theo didn’t say anything, just watched me silently, and I got the feeling he was hoping I’d say more. If our positions were reversed, I’d probably be dying to know what was going through his mind, considering we were all so closely intertwined.

And maybe there’d be some jealousy there. Just a little.

I threw back more wine, and Theo topped the glass back up.

“I’m glad he’s happy,” I said carefully.

Theo snorted. “Are you really?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Because he went two-for-one shopping at a university for his new boy toys.”

“I don’t think they’re just boy toys.”

“What are they, twenty-two? That doesn’t scream ‘lifelong partners’ to me.”

“Zach’s a bit older,” I said, and immediately wondered why the fuck I was trying to justify King’s choices even now. It was automatic, never wanting to make him look like the bad guy—and he wasn’t, really. Sure, he’d cracked my world in two, but I’d never wanted to be with someone who didn’t know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I was the one. Who didn’t wake up wanting to choose me every day.

King had done me a favor, really. It was just sometimes hard to see.

“Why do you do that?” Theo asked, reading my thoughts exactly.

“I don’t know.”

“He’s not here. You can talk whatever shit you want to about him.” He mimicked zipping his lips. “I’m a vault.”

“I know you are.” I sat up and flipped all the skewers to cook on the other side.

“Then talk to me. Tell me what a fucking asshole he is. I’d love to hear it.”

I started to say he wasn’t that at all, but then shook my head. “He just wasn’t the right guy. It happens.”

“Goddammit, Shep, do I have to pay you to say something bad about the man? Just do it. It’s therapeutic. Look, I’ll go first.” He straightened in his chair. “King downgraded big time when he lost you. East is a brat from hell, and I think it’s hilarious he probably spends more time reprimanding him than fucking him.”

I smirked despite myself. “Maybe that’s what he wanted.”

“A brat from hell?”

“Someone to reprimand. Maybe I was too—”

“Good for him? *Oui*, there you go. That’s the spirit. What else?”

“That wasn’t what I was saying. It’s just, Ty—King—and I…” I trailed off, searching for the right way to describe the situation. “We’re too much alike. Both strong willed, driven, confident—”

“Alphas.”

“Huh?”

“You’re both alphas. Both want to be top dog. Hello, the big boss and his second-in-command? What could possibly go wrong?” Theo pursed his lips. “We always wondered how that worked behind closed doors.”

My hand froze on the skewer I’d just picked up. “*We*?”

“Yeah, you know, the rest of us.”

I shook my head and went back to what I was doing, trying not to imagine the conversations over mine and King’s…intimate relationship.

“It worked fine.”

“Wow.” Theo snorted. “Sounds *super* passionate.”

My eyes flicked up to meet his across the flames.

“What? If you ever told someone that our time in bed together was ‘fine,’ I’d track you down and castrate you.”

I picked up my glass and settled back into my seat. “Good thing it’s hot as fuck, then. I kind of like my cock where it is.”

Theo slid his tongue over his lower lip, his eyes falling to my lap. “So do I. But if you think for a second I’m not going to point out you said we’re hot as fuck together, then you’re crazy.”

The wine was now buzzing through my veins as I continued to eye Theo. I probably shouldn’t have said what I just did, but the fact was that King and I *were* too much alike. Both in and out of the bedroom.

It had been hot at first, both of us coming together in a way that seemed to match the other’s energy. But eventually it got to a point where we were always butting heads, always competing for the upper hand—and with King’s being my boss, I’d always felt the need to somehow prove myself to him. Prove that I could handle him.

Turned out that wasn’t what he wanted, and neither did I. He wanted to be in control *all* of the time, and I wanted to be able to turn it on and off depending on my mood.

“Just stating the facts,” I said. “King is with the people he needs to be with. They allow him the freedom to be himself in a way that I couldn’t, and now I can be myself. He did us both a favor—I just wasn’t expecting it, that’s all.”

“What do you mean? How could you not be yourself?”

My eyes narrowed on Theo’s curious expression. “For instance, he never would have let me fuck him at a public event in a restroom.”

He grinned. “His loss.”

“Agreed. But he was very private. Especially with the two of us. He didn’t want there to be an outward connection made. And since I was—am—such a public figure…”

“He thought it would be smarter to bang his students? Come on, Shep. Even you have to hear how ridiculous that sounds. Everyone heard about his scandal.”

“Yes, they did. But East and Zac weren’t connected to him in business in any way. They weren’t involved with Libertine. He never wanted the two to cross. Our relationship made that difficult.”

“They’re members now.”

“But not Kings.”

“Potato, potah-to. I think you’re letting him off too easy.”

I checked on the skewers and, seeing they were done, added two to a plate and handed it to Theo. “What would you have had me do?”

“I told you, castrate him.”

I chuckled and picked up my own plate. “You mind if we stop discussing King’s cock and instead focus on eating the meat in front of us?”

Theo picked up his skewer and bit down, sliding the grilled meat up the wooden stick. After swallowing the bite, he hummed his appreciation.

“I don’t care what anyone says, you are not just a pretty face, Shepard Winchester.”

“Is that what they say?”

He shrugged. “Well, you know, *some* people.”

I swallowed my own mouthful and crossed my ankles up on the pit. “Some people like you?”

“You asking if I think you’re pretty?”

“I’m not *not* asking.”

Theo started at me for a beat then said, “I think you’re pretty fucking amazing.”

I wasn’t sure what I’d been expecting, but that wasn’t it.

“And you’re not too hard on the eyes,” he added.

“Gee, thanks.”

“That’s high praise coming from me.”

“I believe it.”

“And for the record,” Theo said as he slid another piece of meat off the skewer, “I didn’t come to you a virgin either. Shocker, I know, but it’s true.”

I nodded. “I’ll try to hide my disappointment.”

At that exact moment, the sound of a branch cracking somewhere off in the distance had Theo jackknifing upright in his seat and looking around.

“What was that?”

I chuckled and glanced out into the black void that was the jungle. When the sound of monkeys echoed all around us, I relaxed and turned back to a concerned Theo.

“Just a few of the locals,” I told him, and then gestured to his plate. “Better finish up before one swings in here and steals your food.”

Theo’s eyes widened until they almost popped out of his head. “Are you serious? They would really do that?”

“They might.” But probably not, since they were vegetarians. But Theo didn’t need to know that, and honestly, this apprehensive, vulnerable side of the merciless King I knew was kind of endearing. “What’s the matter, Your Serene Highness? Don’t like the jungle?”

“You know what?” he said, getting to his feet, plate in hand. “I have decided I do not, and I take it back. You are not amazing. *You* are an asshole. A good-looking one, but an asshole all the same.”

“So you’re, what, going to take that inside?”

“Oui,” he said, then angled his chin in a way that only a true prince could do. “I’m taking my leave of you and going inside.”

I snorted at his arrogance, the condescension dripping off him. “But who will defend me against the big, scary monkeys?”

“Not funny,” Theo shouted back, storming inside the house.

The slamming of the door punctuated his annoyance as I started after him, and I couldn’t help but wonder when I’d ever had such a good time with anyone.

But the answer was easy, if not a little scary—never.

OceanofPDF.com

33

THEO

I COULDN'T SLEEP.

The bed was top of the line, the sheets crisp yet silky soft, and with the concrete walls down, the place was a fortress. We were safe. We had everything we needed. And yet…

I could still see the car exploding when I closed my eyes. But it wasn't fear that ran through my veins. It was rage. The fact that the motherfucker upending my world was still out there pissed me off, and so did not being able to hunt them down to tear them apart limb by limb. It went against every instinct I had to just sit here and let my brothers get the situation under control. I knew they would—it was what we did—but it still felt wrong to be tucked away in a safe house…*enjoying* myself.

Because even with leech-filled hikes and psychotic monkeys, I couldn't deny that this had been the best time I'd had in forever. That shouldn't have been the case. Shep was bossy to the extreme, a pain in the ass, and he seemed to get off on torturing me with nature.

But he also took every bit of what I threw at him and batted it back, something I respected. I couldn't deal with a guy who let me run all over him, and Shep put up a good fight. He was also protective, a killer cook, and I couldn't even think about his incredible body without getting a hard-on.

So did that mean I was *crushing* on Shep Winchester? *Putain*. He was the last man I should be looking at, but I couldn't seem to get enough of him. King had no idea what he'd done when he put Shep in charge of my

security, and now that I had him close, I didn't know if I'd want to let him go after this was all over.

What the hell was I doing alone in this bedroom?

I threw back the covers and headed down the hallway to Shep's room. His door was cracked open, and I could just make out the way he lay on his back, hands behind his head. He wasn't asleep either, just staring at the ceiling like he was deep in thought. I was tempted to watch him for a while longer, just to look at him, but like he sensed my presence, his eyes shot to mine and I was busted.

I hadn't bothered with clothes, only wearing the boxer briefs I'd stripped down to. As I entered his room, Shep's gaze traveled down my body.

"It's my understanding that you're supposed to be watching my every move," I said. "That's pretty hard to do in separate rooms, so I should probably stay in here."

A wicked smile curved his kissable lips. "That's the excuse you're using?"

"Will it get me in your bed?"

Shep whipped the sheets off. Unlike me, he hadn't bothered wearing *any* clothes. "Does it look like I'm kicking you out?"

Non, it did not. Shep's cock was standing up to invite me closer. But just as I was about to climb in beside him, he held up a finger, halting me.

"Is there a problem?" I asked.

"Yes." Shep's gaze dropped back below my waist. "You're wearing too many clothes."

I couldn't help my grin as I slid my thumbs into the elastic of my briefs and slipped them down my body. When I was finally as naked as he was, I slowly turned, arms outstretched so he could see all of me.

"Well, do I have permission now?"

Shep reached over to his side drawer, pulled out a bottle of lube, and tossed it on the bed beside him. "Get in here."

As I climbed onto the bed, Shep reached for my hand and pulled me down onto the mattress, rolling the two of us until I was on my back and he was hovering over me.

"Ah, you want to play boss tonight," I teased as I spread my legs, letting him settle in between them. "Or maybe the big, brave bodyguard. Do you want me to act helpless? Pretend I need rescuing?"

Shep stared down at me, and with a hand on either side of my head, it allowed me a delicious look at all of his rippling muscles.

“How about we don’t play any role tonight?” he suggested, his voice rough like gravel. “How about we just be ourselves?”

I wasn’t sure what it was about that particular suggestion that made my heart race. It wasn’t like this was the first time we’d been together.

“Ourselves?”

“Yes.” Shep lowered his head until his lips were by my ear. “I want to be with Theo tonight. Not the Prince of Monaco, not my ‘brother’ from Libertine. I want to be with the man who drives me crazy and yet still somehow manages to make me laugh.” He brushed his lips over the top of mine and then added, “I want to be with *you*, Theo.”

I trembled as Shep moved down over me. When he trailed his fingers along my thigh to the crook of my knee, I lifted it up over his hip.

“Let me take you like this,” he said, pressing soft kisses down to my jaw. “Open up to me. Let me watch you fall apart.”

Mon Dieu. Was I really going to do this? It was one thing to have a few quick fucks, ones where no thought was involved, no feelings other than who could get who off the quickest. But as Shep’s cock glided back and forth over my skin, marking me with his pre-cum, all I could think about was feeling him inside me.

“Take me,” I said in a voice I barely recognized.

It wasn’t that I was granting permission so much as I was imploring him to enjoy me, revel in me. I wanted him to lose himself in a way he never had before, and more than ever, I wanted to watch *him* fall the fuck apart.

“Hmm, I like the sound of that.”

That made two of us.

I also liked the raspy groan that followed when I wound my arms around his neck and rolled my hips up off the bed to grind my cock against his.

Shep’s fingers tightened under my knee as he held it up around his waist, but he didn’t need to worry. Now that I had my sights set on taking him, I wouldn’t let go until I had him.

My eyes slammed shut as he kissed me in a way that would’ve knocked me off my feet if I weren’t already flat on my back, because Shepard Winchester the third kissed like he’d taken a master class in it.

Non, non, that wasn't right. He didn't need to *take* a master class. He'd be teaching the damn thing.

"Shep," I said, tearing my mouth free and smoothing my hand down to his chest. "I…"

My words got lost as he trailed his fingers down the side of my face to my mouth, and when he gently traced the outline of it, my stomach flipped.

"You?" he said when I continued to just lie there like I'd swallowed my tongue—which was pretty close to the truth.

"Um." I licked my lips, and Shep gave a slow, sexy smile that had me shaking my head on the pillow. "Could you stop that?"

"What?" He gripped behind my knee and rocked up against me. "That?"

"No." I shook my head again, praying I wouldn't come before I got him inside me. "Being so…"

Shep found the side of my neck and began kissing up under my ear. "So…what? Attentive? Focused? Aroused?"

"*Merde.*" I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to make sense of the emotions rushing in. But there was no making sense of this, no logical reason for how my pulse skipped at Shep's every touch, how my stomach twisted in knots with every seductive word.

"You're the one who came to my room and crawled in my bed."

My eyes flew open at that outrageous accusation. "I did *not*."

Shep raised his head and grinned down at me. "Yes, you did, and now that you're here, you're wondering if my heart's racing as fast as yours. That's easy enough to find out."

I moved my hand a little to the left, and my breath caught as I felt the *thump-thump-thump* of his heart beneath my palm.

"I'm just as nervous as you."

"I'm not—"

Shep slowly shook his head. "Don't lie to me. Not here."

He was right. After everything we'd been through in the last few weeks, the denial had seemed wrong even as it started to leave my mouth.

"This just feels…different."

"That's because it is." Shep let go of my leg and let it slide down to the bed. When he pushed up from me and moved to his knees, I couldn't help but stare at the spectacular image he made.

"You're fucking gorgeous—you know that, right?"

He picked up the bottle of lube and snapped open the lid. “Thanks, but I think you’ve got me beat on that. It’s documented somewhere.”

“*People* magazine,” I said, and reached for my cock, wrapping my fingers around it.

Shep snorted and poured some liquid into his palm. “Have it framed, do you?”

“It was a big accomplishment, being named sexier on that list than you. Not sure if you’re aware of this, but you’re considered quite a catch.”

“Am I?” Shep hooked a hand around one of my calves and brought my foot up to rest on his shoulder, and suddenly I forgot what I was talking about.

“Huh?”

“You were telling me what a catch I am.”

“Oh, right.” My eyes came up to meet his scorching gaze, and a sudden wave of possessiveness overtook me. “Too bad I already caught you.”

“Yes, you did.” Shep swept his fingers across the base of my dick and down to flirt with my balls. When I pushed up off the mattress with my other leg, those teasing fingers slipped down between my cheeks.

Damn, I wasn’t sure I was going to survive this. Shep in controlling mode was sexy as fuck. But this version of Shep, this slow, focused seduction, might just kill me.

As if he could read my mind, Shep gestured to the hand I was using on myself. I held it out to him, and he ran his slippery palm over mine, interlacing our fingers.

“Show me how I make you feel.”

I wasn’t sure how he made the act of touching fingers feel as intimate as he did, but my body responded as though he’d just touched me somewhere else entirely. I reluctantly let go of his hand and, with my eyes on his, began to stroke myself.

“Don’t stop,” Shep said, his voice reverent as he turned his head and kissed my ankle. “I want to watch you.”

He dipped his fingers down to my waiting hole and applied a gentle pressure that had me thrusting through my fist a little faster. But Shep seemed hellbent on taking things slow tonight, on drawing our pleasure out as he teased and tormented the hot strip of skin between my ass cheeks.

“Shep…”

“Right here,” he said, his eyes locking on mine as he slid his first finger inside me. The emotions swirling in those darkened blue depths did nothing to ease the tightness in my chest, and the finger stretching me did little to stop my pounding heart.

Not prepared for how any of that made me feel, I slammed my eyes shut and let myself fall into the feelings crashing into me instead.

Heat…

Pleasure…

Arousal…

Lo—

Lust.

“Fuck, and you think *I’m* gorgeous.”

I opened my eyes to see Shep focused on the way his hand was moving between my legs, his lower lip trapped behind his teeth as though he were imagining savoring something decadent—like me.

“You ready for more?”

I was ready for anything he wanted to give me. But I merely nodded. A second and third finger filled my body then, and after a seriously hot finger fuck, Shep had me bowing up off the bed in an effort to get closer, get more, get it *all*.

My abs were a sticky mess from the pre-cum dripping from the head of my cock. When he pulled his hand from between my cheeks, the loss was immediate—something I hoped he was about to rectify when he grabbed my other leg and brought it up over his shoulder.

I was about as open as I could be to another person, and as Shep moved down over me, practically bending me in half, my breath caught in my throat.

Jesus, this was intense, and so was the man lining his dick up with my body.

“This okay?” he asked, bracing his hands on the mattress on either side of me.

“More than.”

Shep’s lips curved as he rocked over me, and as he finally pushed inside, I let out a low, pleasure-filled groan.

It felt fucking *amazing*.

All the times up until now had been fast, hot, and hard. But as Shep slowly penetrated me, the delicious feel of his thick length stretching me

made my toes curl.

“Damn, Theo,” he whispered as he bottomed out and pressed a fierce kiss to my mouth. “You feel like a dream.”

My body tightened around his, making him moan, and I nipped at his lower lip. “A dirty dream, I hope.”

Shep grinned and rocked over the top of me. “The dirtiest.”

I hummed as he did it again, then arched up, pushing my dick through my hand. “Make me come, Shep.”

“My fucking pleasure.” After another quick kiss, he curled his fingers into the covers and began to move over me in a way that sent flames licking all over my body.

And the view… I didn’t think I’d ever seen anything sexier than Shep, arms braced, his face all serious, as he fucked into me nice and slow. His muscles rippled with every thrust, his expressions tense as he tried to hold back from exploding inside me. The idea of having him fill me, of feeling him drip out of me hours later, made my cock throb even harder in my hand.

“So damn sexy,” he said, his eyes roving over every inch of my face as though he were searching for indicators of what I liked and didn’t. But there wasn’t a thing he was doing now that I’d change.

I could feel him on, and in, every part of me: his warm breath across my lips, his hot body grinding against mine, his hard muscles bunching and flexing against the backs of my legs, his dick deep inside me.

I was fully surrounded by Shepard Winchester, and I was loving every delicious second of it.

“*Oui*, right there… I’m right there, Shep,” I said as his cock rubbed up against my P-spot and my vision began to get spotty.

Shep picked up the pace, and as my climax raced down my spine, he buried his face in the crook of my neck, tensing as he thrust inside me.

My orgasm washed over me like a powerful wave pulling me under, hot jets of cum exploding between us, and seconds later, Shep followed me beneath the waves, filling my body with his arousal as he came on a satisfied roar.

It was the most sensual and satisfying moment of my life. That alone was enough to scare the hell out of me. But the fact that it had just happened with Shep—the last man I should’ve allowed myself to feel this way for—was a whole other problem I’d have to deal with. Because now

that I’d had him, now that I’d experienced this side of Shep, I didn’t give a fuck who his ex was—I wasn’t about to let him go.

OceanofPDF.com

34

SHEP

SILENCE DESCENDED AS we lay beside each other catching our breaths, a rare feat when Theo was around. It should've felt strange in the aftermath, the two of us coming together like this after all these years of friendship and brotherhood. Watching each other go through life, other lovers.

What *was* strange was that it didn't feel strange at all. The opposite, actually. I didn't know what had just changed between us, but it felt like something had, like we'd crossed a line and now, here in the quiet, it was hitting us. I wasn't sure what had gotten into me, only that I'd definitely been the one to start it.

This was *Theo*. Crazy, charming, no-boundaries Theo.

I turned my head on the pillow to look at him, and there was a small smile playing on his full lips.

God, what was he thinking about? Was he having the same insane thoughts that I was? The fact that he was still here and hadn't gone back to his room was already different from our past hookups.

"I think I'll stay in here tonight," Theo said like he was reading my mind, drawing the covers up his body and then giving a contented sigh as he closed his eyes.

I grinned in the dark. And that right there was the endearing side of Theo that could also be infuriating if his wishes were unwelcome. He didn't ask for approval, just announced his plans, and you had to either go along with it or die fighting it.

Shifting onto my side, I plumped the pillow beneath my head and joined him under the sheets. “I suppose I’ll let you.”

He cracked one eye open. “*Let* me?”

“It *is* my bed.”

“*Oui*. Yours is better.”

I laughed at that. “They’re exactly the same, and I would know. I chose them.”

“Still better.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay in here because you’re…scared?”

“Me? Scared? Pshh.”

“No? You didn’t hear those coyotes a few minutes ago?”

“Pretty sure that howling was from you when you came.” He turned on his side to face me, a slight frown marring his brow. “*Merde*… There aren’t coyotes in a rainforest. Are there?”

“Oh, right. Must’ve been the jaguars.”

Theo’s eyes narrowed. “Nope. I’m not falling for it. Although if there is danger lurking, you do have the biggest…gun.” He copped a feel of my bicep and gave it a squeeze.

The teasing between us came naturally, but I could sense it was just a cover for things we were leaving unsaid tonight. Things we probably *needed* to get out, but neither of us seemed to want to be the first to do so.

Shit. Why was I was starting to sweat?

As Theo drew his arm back, I instinctively took his hand and linked our fingers. His eyes flew up to mine in surprise…but he didn’t pull away.

“I appreciate the compliment,” I said, brushing his knuckles with my thumb, “but you can just admit you want to sleep with me.”

He gave a sexy half-smile and squeezed my fingers. “You already know *that*.”

It was hard to pinpoint all the different physical reactions my body was having as we lay there. The unsteady rhythm of my heart, the nervous flutter in my stomach that only intensified when Theo’s eyes dropped to my lips. I’d just been inside him, for Christ’s sake, yet every part of me wanted him closer still. To reach out and run my fingers over the stubble along his jaw…

Hell, why *couldn’t* I?

I didn’t let myself think twice before doing exactly what I wanted to, grazing his cheek, his jaw. Theo’s lips parted, and when he leaned in to my

touch, I couldn’t resist the urge to kiss him.

Fuck it, I thought, threading my fingers through his hair to bring him in close. The second my mouth was on his, I felt it—that spark that was always there when we came together, the one that I’d refused to acknowledge until now.

I slipped my tongue inside to taste him again, slowly this time, letting myself explore and give his mouth my full attention. Theo matched my pace, his soft moan making my sated dick twitch beneath the sheets.

“You taste so fucking good,” I murmured between kisses, brushing my lips along the stubble of his jaw.

“Shep, I…”

“Hmm?”

“I lied earlier.”

I stilled. “About?”

“I *am* a little jealous.”

His words were unexpected, and I had to bite back a smile. “Is that right?”

“It’s just… I mean, it’s King. And you. The two of you together.” He pulled back and looked away for a few heartbeats before swallowing. Then he poked at my chest with his index finger. “You tell anyone that and I’ll deny it.”

He went to draw his hand away, but I took hold of him again, wrapping my fingers around his wrist and lifting it to my lips. I placed a kiss to his palm, and saw an emotion I hadn’t seen in Theo’s eyes before—vulnerability.

“I kind of like that,” I said.

“What? That I’m jealous?”

“Yes. Especially after the fool-ass way I behaved in Osaka.”

“Oh, that’s right,” he said, scooting in a little closer. His leg brushed up against mine, keeping us connected, and something in my stomach twisted with a strange sort of anticipation. “Your green-eyed monster did come out to play that night, didn’t he?”

“Can you blame me?”

“*Non.* I would’ve been pissed watching you eat a meal with someone while I waited outside.”

My teeth grazed the fleshy part of Theo’s palm, and I whispered, “Well, the wait was worth it, as I recall. I can’t remember ever feeling as satisfied

as I did that night.”

When Theo only stared at me instead of making some quip, I wondered if my words had stunned him. In fact, the silence between us dragged on so long that I thought he might need a little more mouth-to-mouth.

“You okay over there?” I said. “I think this is the longest you’ve ever been quiet.”

He shook his head a little before running his hand down my chest. “I’m just basking in my dick’s superiority.”

“Of course that’s what you took from it.”

“I mean, that was quite a confession. I might have to break our promise and lord it over King—”

“Don’t even think about it.”

“Oh, I’m thinking about it now.” The grin on his face was entirely self-satisfied, but given his admitted jealousy of King, he had every right to be.

“Well, don’t think about it too hard. I kind of like this bed without him in it.”

Theo’s grin dropped, his nose scrunching up, and for a second there he almost looked…cute. “Now why’d you have to go and say something like that?”

I chuckled and rolled him to his back. Theo arched a brow.

“You know, I’m starting to think you like getting me on my back.”

I brushed a wayward piece of hair from his forehead and studied the high cheekbones under his stubble. “What if I told you it was more a case of liking *you*—period.”

Theo parted his legs, and as I settled between his thighs, he reached for my face, tracing a finger over my lips. “Didn’t I say something like that back in Monaco?”

“You did. But I wasn’t—”

“Ready to admit you were into me and my big—”

I cut his words off with a hard kiss to those taunting lips, but if I thought I’d silenced him, I was dead wrong. I’d provoked him.

He wound his legs around mine, and with his hands on my chest pushed up until he tumbled us across the bed and he ended up kneeling over me.

“I was just going to say my big *castle*.”

I snorted and ran my hands up his bare thighs. “Liar.”

“Am not. I do have a big…castle.”

My eyes roved down his lean muscles, to the narrow strip of hair that led down to his phenomenal cock.

"You also have a big"—I winked up at him—"ego."

"I'm glad you noticed."

"Pretty hard not to."

He planted his hands on my chest as he rubbed his "ego" against mine.

"So when we get back to civilization and this fucker is caught, what happens with us?"

"Us?"

Theo froze, and I couldn't help my smile. I hadn't been sure where he was at when it came to us. I didn't want to push or presume anything—but as he stared down at me, waiting for my answer, I could see a flicker of uncertainty in that usually confident gaze.

"What?" he said, drawing his hands back, but I quickly put mine over them, keeping them against my chest.

"Nothing. I just…" I chuckled. "I wasn't sure you thought there was an *us*."

"Well, it sure felt like there was one tonight."

"Right."

"And we keep finding our way back here. So I don't know." Theo shrugged, but it was obvious now the nonchalance was for show. "Maybe this is something we should explore."

I sat up, shifting him from my waist to my lap, and brushed my lips over his. "I think you might be right."

Theo swallowed and wound his arms around my neck. "So what does that mean? How do we do that? King will never allow it."

I ran my fingers up his back, and thrilled when he arched into my touch. "I don't remember needing King's permission for who I want to da—" I caught myself before saying something so high school. But not quite fast enough.

"Date? Aw, that's sweet. You want to *date* me?"

I narrowed my eyes on the troublemaker. "I also want to kiss, strangle, and fuck you. But yes." I nipped at his lower lip. "I want to date you, and I don't want to have to hide it."

Theo rested his forehead to mine, and the gesture was such a soft, intimate one that it caught me off guard. It also made my heart skip several beats.

“Moi aussi j'en ai envie,” he said, then pulled back to look me in the eye. “I want that too. Besides, I think my head might explode if you decided to find someone else.”

“Explode?”

“Uh huh, and we both know how unstable I am.”

“This is true.”

“Don’t even need a knife to rid myself of a problem.”

I groaned, knowing just how lethal his hands could be. “Don’t remind me.”

“Plus, I have friends who can hide a body.”

A laugh bubbled out of me. “Chaos. That’s what you are. In *and* out of your suit.”

“That’s right.” Theo pushed me back to the bed. “And just so you don’t forget, how about I show you just how chaotic I can be?”

And for the next couple of hours, he did just that.

OceanofPDF.com

35

SHEP

"I'M GONNA OPEN a bottle of wine," Theo called out from the kitchen. "Red or white?"

"Either's fine." I sat on the edge of the couch, trying to secure a line so we could reach out to King. We'd agreed to touch base every fourth day, and somehow we'd already been in Brazil that long.

God, how had the time passed by so fast? Maybe it was the way Theo had my full attention now, whether it was the hours spent in bed or the moments we came up for air—and occasionally food.

Priorities.

"Any luck?" Theo carried two full-to-the-brim glasses of white wine into the living room, and to my surprise, he'd thrown on shorts and a shirt at some point. He hadn't bothered with clothes in the last couple of days, and I wasn't complaining about that at all, but considering we were about to have a call with our brothers, I didn't need the distraction his body provided.

I just hadn't imagined he'd actually *listen* to my clothing suggestion.

"Think you could've topped me off any more?" I said when he handed me the glass, careful not to spill it.

"I figured you might need the liquid courage to deal with the bossman."

"So what's your excuse?"

Theo grinned and sat down beside me, close enough that our legs touched. "I'm thirsty."

I shook my head and brought the glass to my lips, but stopped when he tsked. "What?"

“It’s bad luck not to do a toast. Everyone knows that.” He lifted his wine and waited for me to do the same. “To you and I staying off the grid. Preferably naked.”

“You’re insane.”

“Just drink,” he said, pushing my glass toward my lips, encouraging the large mouthful I ended up swallowing.

Chilled, slightly sweet, and delicious, the wine went down far too easily, and I found myself drinking a little more.

“Yessss,” Theo encouraged me, moving his hand to my lap to massage my dick. “Let tipsy Shep come out to play.”

“No, no, no.” I set the wine aside and moved his hand. “Work first, play later.”

“Or work and play at the same time…”

“Don’t make me banish you from the living room.”

“I’d love to see you try.”

“A rope and some duct tape and we’re in business.”

“Or maybe just some handcuffs?”

“You can get out of those.”

Theo smiled playfully and then leaned in to press a kiss to the side of my neck. “Fine, have it your way. Let’s get this call over with so we can get this party started.”

I groaned. “I’m going to pretend you didn’t just quote a P!nk song.” As I went back to securing a line, Theo hummed the song under his breath and threw his feet up on the coffee table.

It was a good thing this meeting wouldn’t be a video call. I had a feeling he wasn’t in the mood to behave—something I ended up being dead right about when the call connected to King a few minutes later.

“I’ve got Lachlan, Benoit, and Lucien here,” King said when he answered. “How’s it going with you two? Is Theo there?”

“No, I left him to the psychotic monkeys. Hope you don’t mind.”

Theo shot me a look that said I’d pay for that comment, and in the naughtiest of ways.

Worth it.

“Theo, your parents stepped in for any engagements that couldn’t be canceled, and we’ve kept them informed of the gist of what’s going on without giving details,” King said. “They didn’t feel it was necessary to call Jean back from his honeymoon, and I agree. Any questions from the press

about your whereabouts have been circumvented by letting them know your parents' appearances were always on the agenda after you took the first half."

"I'm sure they're *loving* that." Theo swirled his wine. "Having to take time off from their busy schedules on the golf course to smile and wave."

"I'm sure they're more concerned that you're all right, *mon ami*," Benoit said.

Theo shrugged and took another drink as I asked the burning question we both wanted to know: "Have there been any more incidents?"

Lachlan spoke up. "We've all received several threatening messages regarding having ties to Theo. Why he's been singled out, we don't know."

"But we haven't been physically targeted," Lucien added. "Lachlan's security company has us all covered, so don't worry about that."

"So they know who we are?" I glanced at Theo, who arched a brow in question. "Whoever's doing this knows who the seven of us are, that we're tied together."

"We're still concerned this is an inside job," King said. "A Libertine member with a grudge and access to tech that's beyond anything we've seen."

Translation: beyond anything Alessio had ever seen. And speaking of…

"Where is Alessio? He's not there with you?"

A long silence stretched, and for a moment I worried something had happened to him. But then Lachlan said, "He's struggling."

"Lachlan," King said sharply.

"What? It's the truth. He's been beating down every door to find answers, and the fact that he hasn't cracked it yet has fucked him up."

"He's working on it," King said.

"He hasn't *stopped* working on it." There was an edge of annoyance to Lachlan's tone that made me wonder if they were all close to snapping. "He hasn't gone home in days. Wouldn't even stop to get on this call."

"Didn't even make the monthly trip to see Father Vitale," Benoit added.

Theo and I shot each other a look. The one non-negotiable from Alessio was that we all attended midnight confession once a month, and though he himself didn't partake because of past complicated feelings with the priest, he always made it a point to be there.

Things *really* were fucking bad, then.

“He’ll get there,” King said, effectively ending any other questions when it came to Alessio. He had full faith in him, all of us did, but maybe it was time Alessio asked for help.

I wasn’t about to make that suggestion, though, not when it was obvious things were tense enough over there as it was.

It almost made me feel guilty that Theo and I were hidden away enjoying ourselves while they were the ones dealing with the real-world repercussions.

“So what about you two?” Benoit said. “Are you going mad in the middle of nowhere yet? I’m surprised our prince hasn’t thrown himself off the roof from boredom.”

Theo smirked and set his glass on the coffee table before moving to straddle my thigh. The look of payback in his eyes was clear as he rocked over me, and it was all I could do to focus on the call and not what his troublesome ass was doing.

“Turns out we’ve equipped the house with enough to keep us occupied,” I said. “The game room was a great addition.”

“So was the gym.” Theo waggled his brows at me, and I held my finger up to his lips to silence him from saying more, but he bit the tip of my finger and added, “I’ll be in the best shape of my life when we leave after all the long, hot, sweaty workouts. Keeps me occupied for *hours*.”

Dear God, I was going to kill him, especially when he winked at me and leaned in to nibble at my ear.

If I could’ve pushed him off and pinned his ass to the couch without the noise being obvious, I would’ve done it, but for now all I could do was my best to ignore him.

“I’m surprised Shep hasn’t forced you to do a hike,” King mused.

Theo shifted to bite my lower lip and grinned down at me when I dug my fingers into his thighs. “Actually, this asshole woke me up at the crack of dawn on our first day here to get in touch with nature.”

Several groans sounded through the line. Apparently my interests weren’t a popular choice with this crowd.

“Theo and nature,” Benoit said, amusement clear in his voice. “I’m dying to know how that worked out.”

“Did you really get him to go? I don’t believe for a second Theo touched dirt,” Lucien added.

“It was mud, actually.” Theo glowered at me. “And it got on my shoes. I’m still recovering.”

I rolled my eyes. “Oh, please. He acts like a mosquito bite is attempted murder.”

“You’re forgetting I saved you from a spider.”

“Bullshit.” That was King.

“Excuse me, it’s true. It was massive and about to take a bite out of America’s son, and I basically saved his life. You’re welcome.”

“A prince battling mosquitos and spiders?” Benoit gave a mocking gasp. “*Mon Dieu*. However did you survive without silk sheets and room service?”

I snorted out a laugh, knowing full well Theo preferred street food to room service, unlike me. Hell, King knew it too, which was my guess as to why he didn’t add to that.

“I’ve got Shep,” Theo said, squeezing his thighs tight around me. “He cooks, but unfortunately he didn’t bring any turn-down chocolates.”

“How thoughtless of him for saving your ass instead of catering to your small comforts. You should be fucking grateful.”

Theo’s smile fell at King’s remark, and it immediately rubbed me the wrong way. What the fuck kind of comment was that?

“He was joking,” I snapped.

“Of course he was,” Lucien rushed to say, obviously sensing the tension. “We’re just giving you both a hard time, and knowing our Theo, it’s entertaining to imagine the two of you there.”

Theo ran his hand up and down my arm, soothing away my irritation as he mouthed, *It’s fine.*

I shook my head but tried to brush it off. The last thing we needed was infighting. But damn, King was out of line.

“So we know the spiders didn’t get a chance, but, uh, no other critters have been sucking on you, have they?” There was something in Lucien’s words, a bit of teasing or knowing that had me thinking his question had more to do with me and Theo than any “critters.” Maybe it was the look he had given me at the wedding after the first time Theo and I hooked up that made me wonder.

Thankfully, Theo had the answer for that one.

“Surprisingly, the only thing that’s drawn blood since we’ve been here is a leech.” He winked at me. “Though I did make Shep pay for that.”

“And just how did you—”

Static blasted through the connection, making me wince, and as the line broke up, I reached past Theo to end the call.

I sat back with a sigh, suddenly feeling fucking *exhausted*. It was good to hear from everyone, but the comment from King and Alessio’s stress had me wondering if being here was the best idea. Obviously Theo needed to be, and if I thought for a second he would stay put, I would’ve hopped on the next flight to do what I could to help.

And maybe part of me wanted to have a few private words with King too.

“I’d say that conversation calls for more wine,” Theo announced, reaching back for our glasses. He forced mine into my hand and clinked it against his. “Drink up, *espèce de connard sexy.*"

“Did you just call me a fucker?”

“A *sexy* fucker.”

I smirked and relaxed my grip on his thigh. “That’s better, then.” Theo was right—I needed the wine. I swallowed down a large mouthful before curiosity took hold. “Sexy, huh?”

“*Oui*. The sexiest.” He took a small sip and leaned forward, waiting for me to part my lips. When I did, the wine trickled from his mouth into mine, and I devoured every ounce before sliding my tongue alongside his to steal even more. He gripped the back of my neck, holding me close, our bodies pressed up against one another in a way that was more than sexual. We were wrapped up in each other, and somehow it settled the annoyance that had emerged inside me.

Theo’s kisses tonight were slow, sensual; he took his sweet time like he was deliberately trying to soothe me into submission.

It was working.

“Much better,” I murmured against his lips.

“He’s just jealous.”

My eyes flew open to see Theo looking at me.

“That’s all that was with King. I’ve got you here all to myself, and that has to be driving him crazy.”

“I doubt that. He’s got his hands full.”

“Then he may not even realize it, but trust me, a man like that doesn’t snap for no reason.” He wrapped his arms around my neck and drew me in close again. “So let’s give him many, *many* reasons.”

OceanofPDF.com

36

THEO

THINGS I NEVER thought I'd admit to liking:

- Being taken care of.
- Learning what made Shep laugh and smile.
- Catching Shep looking at me when he didn't think *I* was looking.
- Being the one to make Shep groan in ecstasy.
- And right now, I *really* loved the seclusion of the jungle.

Why? Because while I was laid out on our rooftop deck in my birthday suit, Shep was swimming laps in the pool beside me wearing *his*. And trust me when I say there wasn't a person on the planet who wouldn't want to trade places with me to take in *that* view.

It was amazing what a few weeks could do to one's perspective, not to mention their dating status, when an incredibly attractive man who seemed hellbent on "getting to know me" whisked me off to a safe house in order to save me from certain death.

Usually, I'd find that kind of thing annoying, maybe even slightly suffocating, but when it came in the form of my tall, controlling second-in-command, the only thing I found it…was hot.

I'd gone from resenting having a bodyguard to wanting him guarding my body twenty-four seven. And if he could do it as he was dressed—or *not*

dressed—that would be preferable.

But it went beyond that and, if I were being honest, had for a while now.

The time we spent naked and tangled with each other was sexy and fun, but it was the time *out* of the bed that had been the true shock.

I wasn't easily entertained. As a prince, I had anything and everything at my fingertips, so keeping my attention was difficult—something past lovers had found out quicker than they would like. But with Shep, I found myself enjoying the quiet moments as much as I did the ones full of action—and with our lives, there was plenty of that.

"You didn't fall asleep up there, did you?"

I lifted my head off my arms and reached for my glasses, drawing them down my nose until I could eye him over the top of them.

"*Non*, just baking my buns to perfection."

Shep ran a hand through his damp hair, then made a show of looking past me to said buns. "Be careful, you don't want to burn them."

I glanced back at my oiled-up cheeks to see they already had a nice tinge to them. "They're fine. I'm keeping an eye on them."

"So am I." Shep planted his hands on the edge of the pool and hauled himself out. As I turned back to see the water sluice over his body, my jaw hit the ground. "But maybe I should look a little closer."

As he straightened in front of me, the water ran down the delicious V of his pelvic bone to his strong thighs, then to his calves, and I couldn't help but lick my lips.

"Be my guest," I said, and wriggled my ass in the air as he strolled alongside me, stopping when he reached my backside to shake his head.

I gasped at the feel of the cool water spraying all over my hot skin.

Shep moved down to his knees on the towel beside me and trailed his fingers over the curve of one of my cheeks. "They're a little pink. I think you should turn over."

I chuckled and shifted to my side, to see him grinning at me. "Why, Mr. Winchester, are you trying to get me on my back?"

Shep moved to his hands and leaned in to brush his lips over mine. "And if I am?"

I rolled to my back and placed my hands behind my head, giving him a full, unobstructed view of my naked body. "I'd ask what took you so long."

Shep chuckled, his eyes roving over me and leaving a scorching path that was hotter than the sun. "I keep asking myself the same thing."

My stomach tightened at the serious line of his lips. When Shep got like this, so focused and zeroed in, it was all I could do to stop my heart from skidding to a halt.

He was so intense, so different to me in the way he approached things, including us. Where I was all about the tease and the cheekiness of a moment, he was all control and potent sex appeal.

It was seriously fucking sexy.

"Come here," I said, and crooked a finger, needing to touch him in some way and remind myself that he was real, that *this* was. Otherwise I might start to believe I'd been blown to kingdom come in that explosion back in Wales and this was all just a dream.

Because seriously, was I really enjoying being stuck in the *jungle*?

Shep stretched out beside me, his golden-tanned skin sprinkled with droplets of water, and I moved in to take his face between my hands and press a kiss to his lips.

I'd meant it to be flirty, fun, a way to take our minds off things. But the second our mouths met, the mood changed.

I sipped at the cool water dotting his lips, teasing and tasting until he opened for me and I slipped inside, taking my sweet time to enjoy him. The kiss was lazy and unhurried in a way that said we had forever to explore one another. When Shep's soft groan met my ears, I gently pushed him to his back and rolled with him.

As he settled onto the towel and stroked his hand down my back, I ended the kiss and moved in under the crook of his arm, resting my head on his chest.

Add *that* that to the list of things I never knew I liked.

"This is nice," he said in a way that told me he was as shocked as I was at just *how* nice it felt. "Feels…"

"Right." I turned my face up to see Shep craning his head to look down at me. When he reached for my sunglasses to take them off, I almost protested.

"Strange, isn't it?" he asked as he put the glasses down beside him, and I nodded.

"A little. I keep wondering how I—" I frowned, looking for the right way to put everything I was thinking, when I barely understood it myself.

"How you what?"

"How I never…saw you before."

Shep's lips pulled into a smile so big I felt my cheeks heat. When he started to chuckle, I went to sit up.

"I don't think so," he said, grabbing hold of me and pulling me tight to his body. "You aren't going anywhere."

I struggled in his hold, my embarrassment rushing through me as he kissed the top of my head. "I swear, if you don't let me go, I'm going to kill you."

"No you won't," he said in a voice that told me he was all too pleased with himself. "You look really fucking sweet when you blush."

I glared up at him, and he winked at me, making my cheeks turn even hotter.

"Oh yeah, I like that."

"You're not going to like it when—"

Shep ran his fingers down my cheek and took hold of my chin, cutting off any and all thought. He pressed a soft kiss to my lips. "You know what I was thinking?"

"How impressive I look both coming and going?"

"That we've known each other for so many years that you'd think we'd know everything there is to know about each other."

"Is this your way of telling me you're hiding secrets from me?"

He grinned. "Not intentionally."

"If there's something you wanna know, ask away. I'm an open book."

Shep ran his fingers through my hair, and it felt so good I could've fallen asleep right there. "Why don't you tell me something no one else knows?"

"I think *People* magazine caught that scoop years ago."

"I'm serious."

"Yes, we've established that's your default mode," I teased.

"You won't think so when I throw you in the pool." When his arm tightened around me, I knew he wasn't bluffing. "Give me just one thing."

I was tempted to make a joke about that, but he was looking at me so earnestly that I wanted to give him what he was asking for.

"I never learned how to ride a bike."

Shep blinked at my admittedly random comment, and then his forehead furrowed. "Wait, really?"

"Really. I always had a driver. All the other kids biked to school, but because of 'security reasons'"—I rolled my eyes at that—"I got chauffeured

around. One time I had a few friends over and they all brought their bikes to ride around the palace grounds, so I had to fake injuring my ankle so we couldn't go out."

"Saving face," Shep murmured. "I'm surprised you didn't put your mind to learning after that, being such a stubborn ass and all."

"Hey, rude much?" I went to shove him, but he'd already braced himself from my wrath, his chuckle vibrating through my body as he held me close.

"I'm just saying, once you put your mind to something, nothing stops you," he said. "So you must not have wanted it that much."

"Eh, you're right. I much prefer someone giving me a ride." I waggled my brows at him, making him laugh again. "Okay, your turn. What don't I know about you?"

Shep cocked his head and seemed to think that over. "I was terrified of sleeping at the White House. That's why I didn't stay there during my time at Georgetown."

"What?" I wriggled out of his embrace so I could sit up and look at him to see if he was lying. "I don't believe you."

"Trust me, you're the only person besides my parents I'd ever confess that to, and that was only because I needed to give them a reason to fund my apartment."

"Not even King knows?" As soon as his name left my lips, I wanted to take it back, but Shep just shook his head.

"It's not exactly something I'm proud of, but goddamn, some of those rooms give me the creeps."

I cracked a smile, dying to know more about this new bit of information. Shep wasn't scared of anything, so what was it about that seemingly harmless place that had him running away? "*Mon Dieu*, are there ghosts? Is that what freaked you out? Did you see one?"

"One?" he scoffed. "I saw them and I heard them laughing late at night when I tried to sleep. Once I heard someone playing a violin, and I swear to God I searched the entire house top to bottom, and not one violin anywhere."

"Maybe it was the radio?"

"No way, it was in the Yellow Oval Room, which we used as the family parlor when we lived there. I was studying, and out of nowhere someone started playing, like they were right there in the room."

“What did they play?”

“Something sad and eerie as hell. That was the last straw.”

“Huh,” I said, looking at Shep through new eyes. “I think I like this little game of yours. What else?”

“Oh no, it’s your turn.”

“Right, okay, let me think. Um… I once started a food fight in prep school.”

Shep busted out a belly laugh. “Now *that* sounds like you. I’m surprised that’s a secret, though. Didn’t the press stalk your every move at school?”

“*Oui*, but there were a few times my family had to pay them off,” I said with a proud grin. “And, in that instance, cover a *lot* of dry-cleaning bills.”

“Such a menace.” He brushed his thumb over my lower lip and then leaned back on his hands. “My first kiss was with someone famous.”

I waited for him to finish that confession, to spill the tea, but when he didn’t, I said, “Don’t leave me hanging. Who was it?”

“It might surprise you.”

“You’re killing me over here. Don’t make me guess or we’ll be here all day.”

“Carrie Cabrera.”

“*What?*”

“Told you. It was right after she won the Oscar for *Runaway Train*.”

“So you were, what, twelve?”

“Thirteen.”

“Wait a second,” I said, holding my head so it wouldn’t explode. “I didn’t realize you dated girls. How many others did you kiss, you naughty boy?”

“Just the one, and that was all the confirmation I needed.”

“Aw, poor Carrie. At least she has Oscar to sleep with.” I tried to picture teenage Shep making out with America’s little film star, and while it sounded good on paper, I just couldn’t see it.

I thought back to my past relationships, wondering what I could give Shep that he didn’t already know. It wasn’t like they ever lasted long. Whether that was because I got bored or they couldn’t handle the pressure of being with a public figure, it didn’t matter. There was one undeniable truth, though it made my heart beat a little faster to admit it.

“I’ve, uh…” I swallowed and then just fucking said it. “I’ve never told anyone I’ve been with that I love them.”

Shep’s lips parted, but there was no judgment clouding his blue eyes like I half expected, and that made my apprehension over telling him ease a little.

He stared at me with a thoughtful expression before saying, “Noted. Thank you for telling me.”

The air around us grew thick with tension, this time not the sexual kind, but something deeper. An underlying emotion, an understanding between us, maybe. I didn’t feel judged or awkwardly vulnerable. There was a comfort here that made me want to tell him everything and anything.

But we had plenty of time for that.

“One more truth,” Shep said as he shifted to the edge of the pool to dangle his legs in the water. “I never competed professionally, but I could kick Michael Phelps’ ass in a race.”

“Now you’re just talking crazy.”

Shep arched a brow, the dare in his eyes clear. “I could kick *your* ass in a race.”

Oh, the man wanted to play, did he? I was down with that.

“Careful, Shep. I’m fueled by obstinance.”

“Perfect,” he said. “I’m fueled by winning.”

And then, before I could say another word, he wound his arms around me and wrenched us sideways into the pool.

OceanofPDF.com

37

SHEP

"WHAT ABOUT JACK Brady?" I said, writing his name down on my notepad. He joined the pages-long list of Libertine members Theo and I were brainstorming over, trying to suss out anyone who seemed capable of being the asshole we were searching for.

It wasn't much, but it at least made us feel like we were doing *something* productive while we were forced to hide away. Maybe we'd catch something the others wouldn't, though we both realized the likelihood of that was low.

"I doubt the busiest director in Hollywood is taking time off from filming the next *Star Wars* to mess with little old me."

"You do know you're a prince, right? And he would have access to explosives, or at least know how to pull it off."

"I also know he loves his life, and the fifty-million-dollar mansion he just bought. He's not going to jeopardize that by coming after me for a minor indiscretion that took place two years ago."

"Announcing at one of his premieres that you wouldn't date him because his boyfriend told you his dick was the size of a Vienna sausage is hardly minor."

"*Au contraire.* The whole point was that it was *very* minor." Theo held his thumb and index finger a few inches apart.

"Okay, so no." I scratched the name off the list and moved on to the next. "Thomas Hendrix?"

“Non.” Theo shook his head. “That was just a misunderstanding. We arranged for a little foreign rendezvous on his upcoming movie shoot abroad, but he thought I said I’d be in Australia when I, in fact, said *Austria*. We ended up on opposite ends of the earth, and he was slightly put out. But a quick visit from me on set and a very *personal* apology and—”

“Okay, I get it,” I bit out, staring down at Theo’s twinkling eyes. “So not him.”

He grinned. “Not him.”

“You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?” I said, scratching the actor’s name off the list with a little more force than necessary.

“You jealous?” He leaned back on the bed and waggled his brows. “I’m definitely not *not* enjoying it. But if it’s bothering you, I can think of other things we could do to pass the time.”

I glared at him from where I stood at the foot of my—now *our*—bed. “That’s not going to work.”

“What’s not?”

“Your body. It’s not going to distract me this time.”

“Non?” Theo ran a hand down his body to cup himself through his shorts, and it took every ounce of self-control I had not to toss the pad of paper aside and make him forget he’d ever visited Australia.

“No. We’re going to go through all the people you have pissed off at Libertine to see if any of them seem like a credible threat.”

“Aren’t you the one who pointed out to me how long that would take?”

“Don’t use my words against me.”

“I mean, if you want to know about my exes, Shep, you could just ask.” He gave a smirk I wanted to kiss right off his face. “There’s no need for all this pretense.”

“Be serious.”

“I am. Most of the people who are holding a grudge, I either hooked up with them and left *or* said no to a hookup. Hence their bitterness.”

“And just how many of our members have you slept with?”

Theo shot to his feet and snatched the pad and pen out of my hands before moving back to the bed. As he started to scribble down something—I was assuming names—I started to pace again.

“Can you think of anyone who might have a background in explosives?” I ran a frustrated hand through my hair and squeezed the back

of my neck. “Maybe even computers? Tech of some sort? Programming? Someone that would be able to bypass Alessio and get to all of—”

“Here.”

I stopped and turned to see Theo holding the pad out to me. When I took it from him and looked down at what he’d been writing, I shook my head. There, on a brand-new page, in beautiful cursive writing was:

Under oath, I hereby swear that I cannot remember anyone else that I’ve had sexual relations with after experiencing Shepard Winchester the third’s big cock, which, by the way, is much bigger than a Vienna sausage.

Then the smartass had signed it, *Your Serene Highness, Prince Theodore Rinaldi.*

“Can’t remember them, huh?”

“What can I say?” He grinned and slipped his hand down his shorts. “You fucked them clear out of my head.”

I knew we should keep going, keep brainstorming to see what we could come up with, but there was only so much self-restraint I possessed, and watching Theo stroke himself to full mast had my own cock begging for release.

Mind made up, I tossed the pad to the floor and moved over to the bed. As I whipped my shirt over my head, Theo quickly followed. His grin was victorious as I moved up over him, but when he went to reach for me, I pinned his hands by his head.

“You ever mention Vienna sausages to me again, I just might kill you in your sleep.”

Theo craned up and nipped at my lower lip, dragging it nice and slow through his teeth. “Then I think you should make me forget about those teeny-tiny things”—he lowered his eyes down my body—“by showing me what *you’re* packing.”

I was about to tell him he'd forget when I used it on him. But before I could get a word out, Theo shoved up off the bed, rolling me until I was on my back and he was on top.

"Now, where was I?" he mused, a devilish light in his eyes. "Oh, right, I wanted to see what you're packing. But I think I've changed my mind. It's been at least a week since I've had the pleasure of being inside your tight—"

I tensed at Theo's words, and he must've felt it, because he stopped talking.

"Did you just say a week?" My mind rewound to the last time Theo had taken me over the pool table. "Has it really been a week?"

"I'm not usually one to keep score, but *oui*. You greedy fucker."

"Shit. We forgot to check in with King."

As if a light bulb just switched on, Theo mouthed, *Oh*.

Then, just as quickly, he shrugged it off. "Well, he can wait another few minutes."

"Minutes? I thought you had more stamina than that?"

"Hilarious." Theo drew the infinity symbol around both my nipples, his lips pursing. "I just meant he doesn't need to be in this bed with us. So why don't we forget about him until…after?"

I could do that. What was another hour or so? And the last thing I wanted to do was bring King into bed with us. It had been all I could do to get him out of this house after the last call we'd had. But after several days I'd somehow managed to convince Theo he was delusional when it came to King's acting jealous.

Because that was definitely not the case.

"You're right."

Theo leaned down and pressed his lips to the base of my throat. "Of course I am."

"He can wait."

Theo hummed as he started down my body, moving over to my left nipple to flick it with the tip of his tongue. "Exactly."

"Plus, we're safe, and there's nothing to report. He can check the trackers if he wants."

"He can," Theo agreed, scraping his teeth over my sensitive skin and moving to the other side. "And you can turn your brain off anytime now."

Fuck. He was right. Here Theo was, about to blow my mind—among other things—and I was talking about trackers.

Jesus, Shep, get your shit together.

I closed my eyes and let the feel of Theo's warm lips take over as he flirted his way down my torso to my navel. He kissed, licked, and sucked on it, until I reached for his head and arched up off the bed. That talented mouth was doing a fan-fucking-tastic job of making me forget everything but him.

"Yes, Theo…" I groaned as he nuzzled his nose against my treasure trail, inhaling my scent as he made quick work of my shorts. Then he mouthed his way down the material, his hot breath penetrating the fabric and heating my already-scorching skin.

This was exactly what I needed. To shut off my brain and just *feel*.

Theo lifted his head, and when I opened my eyes to see why he'd stopped, he flashed me a deviant grin and slipped his fingers into my shorts. Then he tugged them down until my cock finally sprang free.

"Hmm, I don't see anything resembling a—"

"Don't you fucking *dare* say it."

He chuckled and wrapped a hand around my throbbing dick, then directed it into his waiting mouth. My head fell back to the pillow the second his lips closed around the sensitive head, and when he swallowed me down to the back of his throat, a shout flew out of me.

The pleasure was so intense that I squeezed my eyes shut, and with the ringing in my ears and harsh breathing distorting my reality, I didn't notice the door to our bedroom open. Nor did I notice or hear that same person walk inside and pick up the notepad I'd thrown to the ground earlier.

It wasn't until a rough cough that I knew *didn't* belong to Theo echoed around the room that my eyes flew open.

"What the fuck is going on here?" the person demanded in a voice that both Theo and I knew in an instant.

The two of us jerked apart in shock, and when we looked to the end of the bed, we saw the one person we'd just banished from it standing there—King.

OceanofPDF.com

38

THEO

TALK ABOUT A buzzkill.

There wasn't much that could wilt my dick when I had Shep's in my mouth, but Tyrone Kingston—Shep's ex and *our* boss—walking in on us had just skyrocketed to the top spot.

A feeling I assumed Shep shared as he wrenched free of my lips and shoved me off him in an effort to cover himself—but King had seen all of him anyway. If anyone should've been scrambling for cover, it was me, considering the dark, murderous glare currently aimed my way.

"Living room. Now," King barely managed to spit out through his gnashed teeth before he turned on his heel and stormed out of the room.

"Fuck," Shep said as he rolled off the bed and snatched up the shirt he'd tossed away in his haste to get naked with me minutes earlier.

"Sorry, but I think that's out now. Unless you were joking about inviting him into our bed?"

Shep's head whipped around so fast that I was surprised it didn't fly off his shoulders, the man I'd been in bed with now long gone.

"You think this is funny?" he asked as he pulled his shirt on, yanking it so hard over his head that I was shocked it didn't rip in two.

"*Non*, but you have to admit the timing was crazy coincidental. If not a little bit scary. You think he planned it?"

"Planned it?" Shep's eyes narrowed. "Did that *look* like a man who expected to walk in and find us…us…"

“Fucking?” I supplied when Shep seemed incapable of even saying what we’d been doing.

“We weren’t fucking.”

“Yet.” My eyes trailed down to where Shep’s cock was still visible. “But a few minutes more…”

He zipped and buttoned his shorts. “Cut it out, Theo.”

“Cut what out? I’m just stating facts.”

“Well, now’s not really the time, is it?”

“Because King walked in? So the fuck what? He was going to find out sooner or later.”

Shep ran an agitated hand over his face, and when he said nothing in response, my own irritation began to rise.

“You *were* going to tell him about us, right? That was what we’d decided.”

“We don’t have time to talk about this right now.” Shep walked around the bed, heading for the door—heading out to *King*—but before he stepped through it, I grabbed his arm, halting him.

“Answer me,” I demanded, needing to know for some inexplicable reason that Shep and I were on the same page before we faced off with King.

“Not now, Theo.” He pulled his arm free and marched off down the hall to the living room.

I glared after him, wishing I had something I could throw at the stubborn ass’s head. Not that it would do me any good, since in the last five minutes I’d watched the Shep I’d spent the last few weeks getting to know—in and out of bed—disappear. In his place was the second-in-command with the stick up his ass.

No wonder he and King didn’t work out. They brought the absolute worst out in each other. It was as clear as the nose on my face that our illustrious leader was jealous of what he’d walked in on.

Hell, I’d been telling Shep that from the second we ended the call days ago.

But *non*, apparently King was fine with the idea of Shep moving on.

Bullshit.

Knowing there was no way out of this, I ran a hand through my hair and grabbed a kretek from the top of the chest of drawers. After lighting up, I made my way to the living room, where I found Shep sitting in one of the

clubman chairs on the opposite side to King, who was standing in front of the windows staring out at the jungle.

Up until now, I'd thought that thick, vast void out there was the most dangerous thing to my wellbeing. But as I came into the room and sat in the chair farthest from Shep, I decided that maybe it was King.

"Nice of you to join us." King's voice was low, so low I barely heard him as I settled in and got ready for my dressing-down.

"Sorry, just wanted to grab a smoke. You know how it is." I looked over to see Shep was laser focused on King, and it took everything I had to not strangle him.

King turned around, notepad still in hand, and I was surprised he hadn't brought up my little love note to Shep—but then again, it wasn't as if King was going to outright *say* he was jealous that Shep and I were obviously together.

Even if it was currently the elephant in the room.

"Well if *you're* ready," King said, and finally turned to face us, "then maybe one of you could explain why you missed your check-in this week."

"It was an oversight on my part," Shep said, ever the good soldier. "I apologize. The days got away from me."

I flirted with the idea of telling King we'd been too busy enjoying each other, but I was pretty sure he'd already come to that conclusion with the way he was white-knuckling the notepad. It wasn't like my message had been subtle.

"Yes, I can see that," King said, his eyes shifting to me, and while most might cower under that direct, accusatory stare, it merely emboldened me.

I took a draw of my kretek and let out a lazy swirl of smoke. "What can I say? We were just so busy enjoying…nature."

King walked closer to me and tossed the notepad on the coffee table. "You were definitely busy doing something."

If he was hoping to intimidate me, he was in for disappointment. King might be my boss, and I might be beholden to him when it came to Libertine and any missions we went on, but I owed him zero explanations about whom I fucked, and I'd be damned if I apologized for sleeping with Shep.

"Or some*one*—" King added.

"We were going to check in today," Shep said, shooting up from his seat and more than likely saving me from a brush with death.

King pivoted in Shep's direction. "Yes, it was clear that was a priority when I arrived."

"Ty, don't—"

"But while you two were busy forgetting to check in and let us all know you were alive, those of us back at home who have been trying to work out who is trying to hurt Theo were worried for your safety."

Way to pack on the guilt trip. But it was difficult to feel too bad when this same man had questioned my loyalties only a few days ago.

"I know," Shep said. "There's no excuse. But we've been going through a list of people that might want to hurt Theo. People that might want to hurt us. *All* of us."

King's nostrils flared as he turned to pick up the damning evidence against me, then looked back to Shep. "This looks like a list of Theo's boyfriends."

"*Ex*-boyfriends," I said, drawing King's attention back to me.

Did I take a little too much pleasure in emphasizing that one word? *Oui*. But he deserved it. He had two—not one, but *two*—boyfriends waiting for him back home. So he could just deal with the fact that I'd stolen this delicious specimen right out from under his nose.

"And you think one of them might want to kill you?"

I could see he thought that highly possible, since he was probably thinking of all the ways he wanted to do so himself right then.

"*Non*." I took another draw of my cigarette, enjoying the spicy taste of the cloves almost as much as King's annoyance. Then I got to my feet and walked over to him. "My exes generally remember me fondly. Can you say the same?"

"Theo," Shep growled from across the room.

But I was too busy facing off with King to pay him any mind. Shep might need a minute—or five—to work out what to say to our leader, but I sure as fuck didn't.

"You know what, it's getting a little cold in here for my liking. I think I'm going to step outside and let you two work this out."

I walked around King, ready to be done with this conversation, and was almost at the door when I heard my name. I stopped, thinking he was about to forbid me from going outside.

"Stay close," he ordered me.

Not. A. Problem.

I might’ve wanted to get out of the frigid air that had just descended inside the house, but I wasn’t stupid enough to go traipsing off through the jungle.

So for now, I’d risk the psychotic monkeys and mosquitos the size of my head, and let the two inside hash out whatever issues they were both trying so desperately to pretend they didn’t have.

OceanofPDF.com

39

SHEP

I KNEW THINGS were about to get contentious when Theo was willing to risk being in nature alone to get away.

I wanted to tell him he didn't need to leave, that anything King had to say, he could be there for, but the words didn't come out. So many different emotions were boiling inside me, and I didn't know which one would burst out first. Being rash never helped anything, and I tried to just breathe and get a hold of my emotions before lashing out.

As the door clicked shut, a tense, taut silence fell between King and me, both of us ready to snap at any moment like a rubber band stretched past its limits.

He didn't move from where he stood with his arms crossed, dark eyes narrowed on me. Anyone else would've cowered under his intensity, but I'd been on the receiving end of his displeasure on too many occasions to back down now.

For a long time, neither of us said a word, but I knew King so well that I could practically count down the seconds until he finally spoke.

"I trusted you."

That was all he said, but those three words were weighted, calculated to make me feel guilty. Like I was the one who'd done something wrong.

Fuck that.

"You were right to," I said. "Theo's safe. That was my task."

"By getting him into your bed."

"I don't remember us discussing the terms. Or my methods."

His eyes narrowed to daggers that could kill. His disapproval and anger radiated off him as he began to prowl the room, like a dangerous animal on the hunt. “You think this is clever? Two Kings, under my roof.”

“*Our* roof. This house belongs to all of us.”

“Do you know the fractures this could cause within—”

“Don’t say it.”

“I’ll say it, and you’ll listen,” he said, moving closer but stopping himself from invading my space. “You two being together complicates everything. We have enough on our hands right now. We can’t afford to break the fuck apart.”

“Then maybe you should trust that I know what I’m doing.”

“I don’t think you even know. Where’s your head, Shep? Because you’re not thinking with the one on your goddamn shoulders.”

I bristled at that, my rage winning out. Fuck him if he thought I wasn’t capable of making my own decisions, or that I would do anything to tear apart the organization we had *all* worked so hard to build.

“You know what, Ty? Fuck you. This isn’t about the Libertines at all. This is about you. You don’t approve of this, and you want to dress it up like it’s about safety and control. *Bullshit*.”

I caught the flicker of surprise in the usually impenetrable King’s eyes at my pushback, but then he growled in the back of his throat. “Control is the only thing keeping us alive, Shep. You should know that better than anyone.”

“You think I *don’t* know that? Everything in my life revolves around our work, so don’t you dare talk to me like I’m some incompetent fucking minion and not your second-in-command.” I didn’t give him the chance to speak, the pent-up words inside me continuing to rush out. “And for the record, I don’t need your permission or approval when it comes to who I decide to let into my private life. You gave up the right years ago.”

“Shep—”

“No.” I held up my hand when he started toward me. “I don’t want to hear it. I know it’s killing you that you don’t get a say in who I choose to be with anymore, but too fucking bad. It’s up to me to make that decision. Not you.”

If anyone else had spoken to King that way, he would’ve had them on the ground writhing in agony. But he simply stared at me with a mixture of curiosity and skepticism, clearly not expecting this version of me.

Hell, I hadn’t either.

King’s jaw twitched, and I could see him trying to carefully choose his next words. “And you choose…Theo?”

My heart stuttered just at hearing his name, but along with that came a sense of guilt. I’d brushed Theo off back in the bedroom when we’d been throwing our clothes on, unable to think clearly after being ambushed by King. He’d asked if I ever planned to tell King about us, and I hadn’t answered him, hadn’t even thought through how that conversation would come up or when the right time would be, but I realized now that Theo had probably taken my dismissal in the moment to mean I wanted to hide it.

Fuck. I knew firsthand how shitty it was to be someone’s secret, and I would never do that to Theo. Just being on the other side of the door from him right now felt physically painful and wrong, which told me all I needed to know.

I wanted Theo. Not as a secret, not as a fun fling while we were hiding out. I wanted everyone to know that wild, beautiful man was mine and I was his. Maybe we didn’t make sense to anyone else, but we did to each other, and I didn’t want to waste another day tiptoeing around that fact. I didn’t know how it happened or why, but I’d fallen for him so hard that I couldn’t imagine waking up tomorrow without him tangled around me. And the way he’d just given no fucks at all when King questioned him? No one else would dare, and that was yet another thing to lo—*admire* about him.

A smile threatened to turn up the corners of my mouth, and I looked down at the floor to hide it until realizing I didn’t have to.

I straightened and looked King directly in the eye. “Yes,” I said, finally answering his question. “I do choose Theo.”

For a moment, King’s composure cracked, long enough for me to see the raw emotion underneath, and then he looked away. “I see.”

Was that regret I heard in his voice? Jealousy? Or was I imagining it? King didn’t want to be with me, that much was clear, but maybe what he *really* didn’t want was for me to be with anyone else either. That would make a hell of a lot more sense, and I was tempted to ask him.

But what difference would it make? He’d moved on, and I was finally doing the same. Maybe he was just so used to always being in charge that it killed him not to call the shots anymore.

“I’ll admit I didn’t picture this. You and Theo. It’s”—King paused, and then his gaze flicked to our bedroom and the tangle of sheets on the floor

—“unexpected.”

“That makes two of us.”

He turned away from me then, lacing his hands behind his neck as he paced the room. I didn’t need a past relationship with him to read that he wasn’t thrilled with this turn of events.

But I didn’t care. Not anymore. It wasn’t King’s feelings I had to consider—it was Theo’s.

If he still wanted to pursue this after my dick behavior.

“He’s not right for you,” King said. He still wasn’t looking at me, staring up at the painting above the fireplace, his hand braced on the mantel.

“That’s your opinion,” I countered. “And you’re wrong.”

“I’m rarely wrong.”

“That’s not never.”

That had him snapping his mouth shut, and as silence settled between us again, I found myself looking toward the door and hoping Theo would walk back through it. It was already the longest I’d been without him in weeks, and I didn’t like it. Not at all.

When King finally turned back around, there was a hard set to his jaw. Any underlying emotion he’d been feeling was gone, and in its place was the unyielding leader mask he wore.

“Do what you want,” he told me. “But if this…*thing* jeopardizes the Kings in any way, I’ll end it myself.”

“This isn’t something you can end, Ty. Not anymore.”

“Then you better hope he’s worth it.”

A smile curved my lips, and I didn’t care if it rankled him. “He is.”

King’s resigned, heavy exhale was the only sound in the room as he pushed off the mantel and headed for the door. I didn’t miss that he wasn’t even looking at me anymore, but he’d just have to get over it. This “thing” with me and Theo was happening, and there wasn’t a damn thing he could do to stop it.

He grabbed the door handle like he was ready to rip it open, but then paused.

“Every four days, Shep. Set a goddamn alarm if you have to.”

“Yes, boss.”

The way I’d slipped back into my status as his right-hand man had King’s shoulders settling a little, and then he nodded once and jerked the

door open.

I followed after him, just in case Theo was feeling feisty and decided to push a few buttons on King's way out. I wouldn't put it past him to use King's car as an ashtray for his kretek.

But as I stepped outside into the hazy, late-morning fog, I didn't see him.

I glanced over at the chairs surrounding the firepit, expecting to see him smoking away with his legs kicked up, but he wasn't there either.

Surely he wouldn't have gone far, especially with visibility being so shit after a heavy rain last night.

"Theo," I called out, checking the inside of the cars and then rounding them to head down the driveway. "You can come out now. He won't shoot."

"I didn't promise *that*," King muttered, but he was already checking out the other side of the property.

A strange, sinking feeling settled in the pit of my stomach, but I refused to give it any credence as we continued to call out for Theo…and got nothing back in return.

It wasn't until I saw the still-burning kretek on the ground that I felt my panic begin to rise.

"Ty," I called, but my voice came out strangled, my breath getting caught in my throat. My legs gave out on me and I hit the ground hard on my knees, but I didn't feel any pain other than the sharp stab lancing my chest as my worst nightmare came to life.

King sprinted to my side, but I couldn't hear anything he was saying, not with the blood ringing in my ears.

I looked up, my vision of him blurred as I choked out, "He's gone, Ty. Theo's gone."

OceanofPDF.com

THANK YOU

Thank you for reading
MERCILESS (Park Avenue Kings #4)

We had SO much fun bringing these two Kings together. We knew it would be such a hot pairing and bring with it all *kinds* of trouble—trouble that's just begun!

Up next, the continuation of Shep & Theo's story in RUTHLESS King.

OceanofPDF.com

SPECIAL THANKS

We want to give a very special shout out and thanks to some wonderful people who made the writing of Merciless possible.

Hang Le, Arran, Shauna & Becca at The Author Agency, Fifi at The BookishPulse, Gel with Tempting Illustrations, Ren Saliba, and Zaza & Chloé from our Patreon for our French translations.

Thank you, to you, our readers. Whether you're in our private reader group, The Naughty Umbrella, on our Instagram or Tiktok, or one of our Patrons, we appreciate each and every one of you so much for picking up our books. It means so much to us that you'd spend your time falling in love with the worlds we have created.

We are loving every second of this new world where our kings work behind the scenes to get everything their hearts desire, and we can't wait to bring you each and every one of their stories.

Xx Ella & Brooke

OceanofPDF.com

ALSO BY ELLA FRANK

The Exquisite Series

Exquisite

Entice

Edible

The Temptation Series

Try

Take

Trust

Tease

Tate

True

Confessions Series

Confessions: Robbie

Confessions: Julien

Confessions: Priest

Confessions: The Princess, The Prick & The Priest

Confessions: Henri

Confessions: Bailey

Confessions: Ethan

Confessions: Zayne

Confessions: Chloé

Prime Time Series

Inside Affair

Breaking News

Headlines

Intentions Duet

Bad Intentions

Good Intentions

Chicago Heat Duet

Wicked Heat

Wicked Flame

Sunset Cove Series

Finley

Devil's Kiss

Masters Among Monsters Series

Alasdair

Isadora

Thanos

Standalones

Blind Obsession

Veiled Innocence

PresLocke Series

Co-Authored with Brooke Blaine

Aced

Locked

Wedlocked

Fallen Angel Series

Co-Authored with Brooke Blaine

Halo

Viper

Angel

An Affair In Paris

Lust. Hate. Love

Elite Series

Co-Authored with Brooke Blaine

Danger Zone

Need For Speed

Classified

Dare To Try Series

Co-Authored with Brooke Blaine

Dare You

Dare Me

Truth Or Dare

Malvagio Series

Co-Authored with Brooke Blaine

Forbidden Mafia Prince

Sinful Mafia Prince

Park Avenue Princes

Co-Authored with Brooke Blaine

Infamous Park Avenue Prince

Insatiable Park Avenue Prince

Scandalous Park Avenue Prince

Possessive Park Avenue Prince

Salacious Park Avenue Prince

Notorious Park Avenue Prince

Park Avenue Kings

Co-Authored with Brooke Blaine

SAVAGE

DEVILISH

IMMORAL

MERCILESS

RUTHLESS

UNHOLY

Standalone Novels

Co-Authored with Brooke Blaine

Sex Addict

Shiver

Secrets & Lies

Wrapped Up in You

All I Want for Christmas…Is My Sister's Boyfriend

Jingle Bell Rock

Once Upon A Sexy Scrooge

OceanofPDF.com

ALSO BY BROOKE BLAINE

South Haven Series

A Little Bit Like Love

A Little Bit Like Desire

The Unforgettable Duet

Forget Me Not

Remember Me When

Hate to Love You Series

Bedhead

L.A. Liaisons Series

Licked

Hooker

P.I.T.A.

Romantic Suspense

Flash Point

PresLocke Series

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Aced

Locked

Wedlocked

Fallen Angel Series

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Halo

Viper

Angel

An Affair In Paris

Lust. Hate. Love

Elite Series

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Danger Zone

Need For Speed

Classified

Dare To Try Series

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Dare You

Dare Me

Truth Or Dare

Malvagio Series

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Forbidden Mafia Prince

Sinful Mafia Prince

Park Avenue Princes

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Infamous Park Avenue Prince

Insatiable Park Avenue Prince

Scandalous Park Avenue Prince

Possessive Park Avenue Prince

Salacious Park Avenue Prince

Notorious Park Avenue Prince

Park Avenue Kings

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

SAVAGE

DEVILISH

IMMORAL

MERCILESS

RUTHLESS

UNHOLY

Standalone Novels

Co-Authored with *Ella Frank*

Secrets and Lies

Sex Addict

Shiver

Wrapped Up in You

All I Want for Christmas…Is My Sister's Boyfriend

Jingle Bell Rock

Once Upon a Sexy Scrooge

OceanofPDF.com

ABOUT ELLA FRANK

Ella Frank is the *USA Today* Bestselling Author of the *Temptation series*, including Try, Take, and Trust and is the co-author of the fan-favorite *Fallen Angel series.* Her *Prime Time series* has been praised as “highly entertaining!” and “sexy as hell!”

A life-long fan of the romance genre, Ella is best known for her steamy, heartfelt, M/M romances.

If you’d like to join Ella & Brooke’s Patreon for a look behind the scenes, to read chapters early, to get ARCs first, this is the place right here!

Brella Patreon

You can also find them in their Facebook Group

The Naughty Umbrella
(Facebook Group)

And if you would like to talk with other readers who love Ella’s character’s from her Chicagoverse, you can find them **HERE** at
Ella Frank’s Temptation Series Facebook Group.

Want to stay up to date with all things Ella?
You can sign up here to join her newsletter and get a FREE ebook.

OceanofPDF.com

ABOUT BROOKE BLAINE

Brooke Blaine is a USA Today Bestselling Author best known for writing romantic comedy and M/M romance. Her novels lead with humor and heart, but Brooke never shies away from throwing in something extra naughty that will scandalize her conservative Southern family for life (bless their hearts).

She's a choc-o-holic, lives for eighties bands (which means she thinks guyliner is totally underrated), believes it's always wine o'clock, and lives with the coolest cat on the planet—her Ragdoll/Maine Coon mix, Jackson Agador Spartacus.

Brooke's Links
Brooke's Newsletter
Brooke & Ella's Naughty Umbrella
www.BrookeBlaine.com

If you'd like to join Brooke & Ella's Patreon for a look behind the scenes, to read chapters early, to get ARCs first, this is the place right here!

Brella Patreon

OceanofPDF.com